# THE Hudson REVIEW

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, who teaches at Cornell, is a Beyliste of long standing.

LOUIS SIMPSON'S verse pastoral, *Good News of Death,* appeared in a previous issue of this Review.

Three new writers appear in print for the first time in this issue: ALAN FRIEDMAN is living in New York and working on a novel; R. D. B. HUDSON is employed by a book publishing firm in New York; JAMES R. FRAKES is a member of the Department of English Composition of The Pennsylvania State College.

HUGH KENNER'S book, *Wyndham Lewis,* will be published by New Directions next year.

MICHAEL HARARI is a young Egyptian writer, published now for the first time in this country.

REUEL DENNEY teaches in The College of The University of Chicago, where he is also a member of the Committee on Communication.

DONALD HALL will be at Stanford this year on a creative writing fellowship.

IRMA BRANDEIS teaches at Bard College and The New School for Social Research; she is currently working on a book on Dante's imagery.

DOROTHY DONNELLY lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has published two books and a number of essays, and has recently turned to the writing of poetry.

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN is a member of the Literature Department at Bennington.

WILLIAM BECKER spent this past summer in England and France.

WILLIAM MEREDITH has been in Tokyo as a reserve naval person several times in the past few years.

IRVING SINGER is on the faculty of the Philosophy Department at Cornell.

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# The Hudson Review

EDITORS: *William Arrowsmith, Joseph Bennett, Frederick Morgan*
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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

# Art as Insurrection: The Charterhouse of Parma

"POLITICS IN A WORK OF LITERATURE," said Stendhal, "are like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something crude which nevertheless one can't possibly ignore." The remark explodes at point-blank range within a work of startling, studied obliquities; it is ungracious, impolitic, untrue, and appears before us shamelessly dressed in the splendid refutation of its own bald cynicism. For *The Charterhouse of Parma*[1] is one of the great political romances; that is, one of the very few works of fiction ever to transform politics into the music of the heart. A pistol-shot, indeed! The politics of Stendhal are a miraculously prolonged operatic performance, of infinite bravura and infinite finesse;—within which, to be sure, moments occur of such violent anguish and brutal truth, as would seem deliberate violations of art, were their effect not so cunningly calculated and exactly foreseen. As in Bernini's monument to Pope Alexander VII, in Saint Peter's, which poises nobility, piety, devotion, and grief miraculously over a doorway, while trailing the grisly memento-mori of a skeleton in the viewer's face, Stendhal's romance mingles the noble and exalted vision, a radiance miraculously floating in a cloud, with a blunt, brutal reminder of our bondage to things. But the effect, though grotesque, destroys harmony only by overfulfilling it. Politics in literature are not, for Stendhal, a brutal accident, but the fulfillment of an art which includes within itself a device to make us scorn art.

As with Crashaw, Bernini, and Cimarosa, Protestant Anglo-Saxon opinion has not known quite what to make of Stendhal's novel, which is of the high baroque not only in its style and manner, but in its central theme. Certainly one is not prepared for *The Charterhouse* by anything in the English tradition of political fiction. The Anglo-Saxon temperament does not usually de-

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fine politics in terms of gunfire and music, but as a mere extension of one's normal occupation, business. And the English novel has not very often played, like Stendhal, with the counterpoint of life and art, the tendency of art to overstep its boundaries and usurp the quality of action. *The Charterhouse* is in direct line of descent from *Don Quixote;* and to take it at any lesser estimate is to miss its impact altogether. It cannot very well be read, like *The Red and the Black,* or Byron's *Don Juan,* as the adventure of an innocent in love, war, and intrigue—as a spectacle being impressed on a blank, sensitive plate. Sensitive though he is, Fabrizio del Dongo is neither blank nor innocent; and the most striking developments of the later novel are the reverse of spectacular. One might almost say that, in terms of action, a basic trend of the novel is toward anticlimax. Altogether, Stendhal's *Charterhouse* is odd in many different ways—in its off-center title (the Charterhouse is not so much as mentioned till the last two pages of the novel); in its sudden rush into the big "action" scene, Waterloo; in its explicit asides to the reader; in its hasty, compressed, and muted termination. Clearly, both the politics and the psychology of this strange and noble novel are in need of clarification.

The real trouble we encounter in reading *The Charterhouse of Parma* is that it is revolutionary—more revolutionary than our expectations can easily be widened to understand. Fabrizio del Dongo, the hero, is at first glance a typical young man of romantic sensibility; wild, untutored, primitive, and undisciplined, with a curious quiet mystery about his parentage in the background. He is enthralled by beautiful landscapes, bursts into floods of facile tears, cultivates the mysteries of astrology, and senses strange affinities between his soul and a tree planted at the time of his birth. Appropriately enough, Fabrizio begins his insurrection within the theater of the family, hating his nominal father and despising his brother. Oedipus is, for Beyle, the root of all action. But Fabrizio quickly carries this warfare onto the field of physical battle, where most novels of revolt conclude; and at Waterloo, in a scene of the most striking overtones, he is unhorsed by his own secret, ideal father, the General Count A—; who, as Fabrizio helplessly calls out "Stop Thief", gallops away on his son's horse into the smoke of battle and out of the book. Thus

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the cycle of finding and partaking of a heritage is fulfilled within a hundred pages; and Fabrizio's search for a spiritual father comes an ironic cropper in the father's greedy monopoly of adventure. The romantic hero is a horse-thief after all.

Waterloo is, for Fabrizio, in the nature of a deflowering; it also sums up and dismisses rebellion as direct emotional excitement or overt physical action. These themes have been played out; 1793 used them up, and the nineteenth century will have to find other expressions for a rebellion which, at the same time that it becomes ever more pervasive, is forever being denied overt expression.

The logic of this denied expression is not simply, though it is partly, despair at the practical grossness of warfare, the looting, greed, and venality of an army. It is also a general failure of experience before the test of imagination. Fabrizio under fire can only ask, "Is this a real battle?"—as later he will ask about love, "Is this all there is to it?" Even at their best, adventure and romance are tainted with egotism. And with the collapse of Europe into a government by arrangement, the taint becomes ever more pervasive, the escape from self-interest more difficult and indirect.

The battles which are fought during the remainder of the book, on a stage suddenly narrowed from Europe to Parma, are not real battles; the loves of Fabrizio, with one exception, are hollow and routine. A narrow reading of these scenes of sham may suggest that the chief political object of Stendhal's satiric observation is absolutism; but if this were true in any direct sense, the novel would be a great deal simpler than it is. A political insurrectionary recurs in *The Charterhouse* after Waterloo; but he is an outlaw, a robber, and a madman (as well as a literary genius), and he sums up his difficulties as those of "creating a Republic without Republicans". The Republican spirit is everywhere in Parma, chiefly under the negative guises of cynicism and fear, but there are no Republicans. And the question of politics is thus changed from the transformation of society to the discovery and preservation of one's self.

Hence it is on the field of psychology that the great political battles of the novel are fought; like *Paradise Lost*, *The Charterhouse* is constantly narrowing its physical boundaries in order to enlarge and spiritualize the figure of the adversary. Stendhal

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thereby provides for his hero a foil which is not simply absolutism or liberalism or middle-class Franklinism, but the whole machinery of thought-control and -conditioning which is a striking feature of the modern state. The politics of Parma consist of the manipulation of slogans and the suppression of intelligence; the only real division is between those who are subservient to the flatulent official eloquence, and those who have retained in some measure, however slight, a personal self, an individual perspective. Immediately upon his arrival at court from theological school, Fabrizio is put to the question by Rannucio-Ernesto IV. His hypocrisies, though unexceptionable—precisely *because* they are unexceptionable—betray the presence of intelligence; and the Prince, who is himself a man of wit and spirit, though overruled by terror and self-importance, recognizes at once a member of that freemasonry which he is bound to stamp out or subdue. In this way the stage is set for that prolonged and subtle duel, in the course of which Fabrizio discovers his soul; a duel in which the net and trident of authority are opposed by the sword and dagger of reason and ridicule. No more flashing and splendid example of this duel could be sought than the gloriously operatic scene in Chapter XIV between the Duchessa Sanseverina, the Prince, and the Conte Mosca; but the struggle is pervasive, governing every action and every thought of the central characters.

Because the outer form which authority assumes in the novel is absolutist, the modern reader, who approaches *The Charterhouse* with the ironies of Koestler and Orwell in the back of his head, may well be most impressed by Stendhal's clinical analysis of authoritarian infallibility. For example, Conte Mosca, with the soul of a rebel but the instincts of a courtier, cannot bring himself to utter publicly the words "unjust proceedings" as applied to the Prince; they are too grotesquely and obviously ridiculous. Overpage, he will be delighted at the Prince's poisoning; he approves of regicide but not of absurdity, not of self-contradiction. Princes may be assassinated, this is a fact of politics and often a very pleasant fact, but they simply do not proceed unjustly. When an inconvenient revolt occurs, Mosca is superb in the aplomb with which he dismisses it from the pages of history:

> If you read our *Gazette* you will see that a clerk at the citadel, named Barbone, has died as the result of falling from a carriage. As for the

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> sixty odd rascals whom I dispatched with powder and shot, when they were attacking the Prince's statue in the gardens, they are in the best of health, only they are travelling abroad. Conte Zurla, the Minister of the Interior, has gone in person to the house of each of these unfortunate heroes, and has handed fifteen sequins to his family or friends, with the order to say that the deceased is abroad, and the very definite threat of imprisonment should they let it be understood that he is dead. . . .

Wholesale deletions from what we have come, with unconscious cynicism, to set apart as "the record" are of course specially easy under authoritarian governments, but they are common to all governments. And within the novel, the citizens of Parma, the Court, the Liberals, the True Liberals, and the Jacobins themselves all acquiesce in these crimes against truth, not from fear necessarily but from sloth. Fabrizio's escape from the Torre Farnese is handled by all parties with equal freedom. The common people, who consider him guilty, admire his courage in effecting a dangerous escape. The court, which is equally prepared to think him innocent or guilty of the charge, will not recognize that any courage was involved in the escape, and amuses itself with a new and specially polite phrase for jail-breaking,—"removing oneself from the clemency of a magnanimous prince."

> As for the police . . . , they had officially discovered that a band of twenty soldiers, corrupted by the money distributed by the Duchessa . . . , had given Fabrizio four ladders tied together, each forty-five feet long; Fabrizio, having let down a cord to which they had tied these ladders, had had only the quite commonplace distinction of pulling these ladders up to where he was. Certain Liberals, well known for their imprudence, and among them Doctor C---, an agent paid directly by the Prince, added, but compromised themselves by adding, that these atrocious police had had the barbarity to shoot eight of the unfortunate soldiers. . . . Thereupon Fabrizio was blamed even by the true Liberals, as having caused by his imprudence the death of eight poor soldiers.

The soldiers happen to be wholly imaginary; but their physical existence is altogether insignificant, one way or the other. For everyone in Parma has a way of interpreting anything that happens, so that it will serve political ends. As a result, nothing ever really does or does not happen, but various things are by various interests made to seem to have happened. The central episode

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of the novel, on which the entire career of Fabrizio comes to turn, is an incident of no inherent significance. Fabrizio kills a comedian in a dispute over an actress. Now for a Del Dongo to kill or have killed a Giletti is in itself nothing. But political faction can turn it in any direction, inflate it to any dimension; and so the effort to make things seem a certain way takes complete precedence over the effort to make them be a certain way. And these, though they may be seen in several perspectives, are the unalterable conditions of the new life.

Stendhal makes much of these ironies, especially through the person of the Conte Mosca, that unsurpassably cynical explainer. But his real problem, dramatically speaking, is the adventuresome Fabrizio. What will happen to Fabrizio's soul under a regime of suave and cynical manipulators, a regime of immovable falsity? Heroic adventures are out of the question; and their place is taken, for a moment, by empty dissipations with Fausta and Marietta, not essentially different from those "vulgar happinesses" which, as an idle young man on an allowance, Fabrizio might have taken as his daily occupation. But the destiny of Fabrizio includes a deeper form of self-knowledge; and the theme of the prison, several times adumbrated in the earlier part of the book, is now introduced in its full scope.

The two great novels of Stendhal provide ample evidence of the special fascination that prisons held for him. Julien Sorel achieves in prison an almost Christ-like apotheosis; and Fabrizio del Dongo comes in prison to know the self, the love, and the expression, which society has done its utmost to deny him. Literary dungeons carry an ancient overtone of womb, tomb, and rebirth; Dionysos and Christ, Samson and John Barleycorn rise from prison, bearing the light which bursts from darkness; Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and a host of Oriental deities with Oriental names repeat the pattern back into antiquity. But Fabrizio's dungeon is not only a place of burial, it is a three-hundred-foot erection, a cavern poised atop a tower. It serves Fabrizio as a pinnacle for emotional flight, as a seed-bed for the generation of his soul, a summit of power and happiness, a refuge from and a fulfillment of passion. Within the prison, which is his new and deepened self-consciousness, is accomplished somehow, mysteriously, the crystallization of his soul and his love; within the prison he be-

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comes an artist, a poet not merely in words but in feelings. The triple knot of Stendhalian sentiment, erotic, Narcissistic, and creative, is tightly tied in the depths of the dungeon and in the isolation of the lofty tower. As a result, Fabrizio becomes more whole and secure of feeling than ever before. His piety, his ambition, and his love are combined, not without some latent strain, in the vocation of popular preacher; and the vehemence with which he publicly implores mercy of his mistress gains him credit for the utmost piety, just as his ambition is best served by the wearing of a shabby black coat.

Undoubtedly there lurks in this "solution" a germ of the exquisite Stendhalian irony; the arrangement with Clelia, for example, is attained only by a specially sardonic rearrangement of a religious vow. Having sworn before the Virgin that she will never see Fabrizio again, Clelia delicately conducts her affair with him in the dark. Touches like these fall just short of burlesque. But there is also an element of seriousness in the observation that, where the business of society is to misuse language in its interests, the revenge of the artist is to make his own special perversions of speech in his interests. The phrasing need not be cast in such vindictive terms, though vindictiveness is one element of the total reaction. The artist creates a refuge from society, he also does pleasure to society; and at the same time, he sets it at secret defiance. This triple quality of the artist's response is, I think, a distinguishing and triumphant quality of the artistic subversion which Stendhal brilliantly exemplifies.

## II

The peculiar flavor of Stendhal, by which we "place" him in history, derives from his concern with the calculated stupidities of Metternich's absolutism. But absolute power, in the most tyrannical of states, can only be exercised as a last resort. It is too lawless to be economical; and the routine work of government is always done with symbols, not swords; by persuasion, not compulsion. It is in this area of manipulated terminologies, of formulas and phrases and verbal conformities, that Stendhal's ironies find their most elegant and limber play. Our own times have seen the enormous growth, in numbers and influence, of

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those social and psychological engineers whom Stendhal described as the manipulators of words, the governing classes of Parma as of Europe. The game in which they are all engaged is a strict and complex one; they take for enemies not only one another, but the stubborn, knotty texture of physical facts, which they delight in twisting and altering. Certain practical penalties are provided for losers; the dungeon, the poison, the scaffold. But Stendhal's novel is not simply a dogfight or a ratrace. Spiritual values are involved, spiritual and emotional independence is at stake. And our deepest feelings are agitated, not by those who win or lose, but by those who refuse to play the game. This fact is responsible for the most resonant overtones which the novel now carries.

For the great question which, as I see it, today faces both the literary artist and the sensitive individual of any function, is precisely that of finding an adequate response to the social engineer, the political and social manipulator. By treating humans as push-button assemblies whose responses are as easily triggered as an automatic elevator, the market and the "human engineers" have succeeded in pre-empting and controlling most of the gross human satisfactions. The purveyors of ads and slogans have, for example, almost completely taken over the positive emotions of happiness. Adventure belongs to Hollywood, romance to the writers of popular songs, and patriotism to the yellow journalists. The very words have been corrupted, so that one no longer talks about "adventure", "romance", or "patriotism" without the inverted commas which serve to sterilize and disclaim them. Because they are so crude in themselves, and so often used to conceal traps for boobies, these gross responses have become largely suspect to sensitive people—as even insensitive people came long ago to question the emotional overtones, in a political situation, of home, mother, and Old Glory.

Not only is positive identification with the gross responses suspect; negative rebellion from them has also been channelled into stock patterns. One may foresee the psychological casualties of a military offensive as easily as the physical casualties; a toothpaste campaign will count on winning as many customers by irritation as by the more hopeful emotions. Even the deeper forms of revolt, when summed up in the jargon of social psychology, take on the qualities of mechanically predictable and easily manipulated re-

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sponse. Thus even rebellion becomes a lesser form of conformity. Both positively and negatively, our culture belabors us with those discouragements to nonconformity which are the peculiar arsenal, within the family, of the "understanding parent". The rewards of contentment are associated with conformity; "kindly" indifference and psychological deflation through mechanical explanation are used against rebellion. This craft of rewarding the social motive and giving a social coloration to the individual motive is by way of becoming the greatest applied social science of our time, a kind of business in which the mass media of communication and the subtler manipulation of symbolic actions combine to enormous practical effect. The ultimate product of this business, which flourishes as mightily under "democracies" as under "dictatorships", is that state of universal receptivity which signalizes the complete destruction of a point of view, a critical habit of mind.

In a novel, or at least a tract, of still-increasing significance, called *Brave New World,* Aldous Huxley almost twenty years ago symbolized the two weapons of society against its inmates by two appropriately mechanical devices. The drug *soma* provides for inhabitants of the Brave New World the reward of conformity, contentment; the tragedy-pills, administered once a month, purge the human creature of his rebellious, unsocial, and sublime emotions. Conformity is achieved through the conditioned reflex; and the conditioned reflex, which calls for as absolute a response as does Rannucio-Ernesto IV, and is quite as independent of the values of reason, may be recognized as the common enemy of Stendhal and Huxley and indeed of the thinking individual in the modern world generally.

How to react against the science of conditioned reflexes without, by the mere fact of reaction, demonstrating its laws? In a sense, there is no solution to the problem; merely by posing it on so low a level, one renders it insoluble. Huxley's tract includes a couple of figures who partially rebel, and one who wholly rebels, against the regime of social conditioning represented by the Brave New World. The character known as John, or The Savage, serves to represent at once the Natural Man (he was brought up among Indians), the Religious Man (he seems to have had some experience of the Penitente sects), and Artistic Man (he has read Shakespeare). But when faced with the slick, efficient, soul-less chal-

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lenge of a Brave New World, he reacts simply with a contrary set of conditioned reflexes, first whipping and finally hanging himself, to the accompaniment of Shakespearian declamations. The inhabitants of Brave New World are much amused by this behavior, and one cannot quite blame them. The behavior of The Savage fails to carry conviction to the automatons, and fails equally to convince the reader, because it is simply a contrary automatism. Writing in 1951, Huxley now tells us that if he were writing the book over again, he would not set two compulsive ways of life in such stark opposition, but would have a little lecture delivered on ways and means of preserving the spiritual life while getting the best profit from the machine. He would offer The Savage a chance to contemplate the universe, read Shakespeare, and respond to his natural instincts, while conforming part-time with the modest regulations of a local community built around some carefully penned-up mass production. But this solution, though wrapped in a little more intellectual silver-paper than the alternatives of the tract itself, simply substitutes a bundle of conditioned reflexes in forced wedlock for the same reflexes in isolation.

The failure of *Brave New World* is that it confronts its dilemma nakedly, as a problem in social engineering; and independence simply cannot be engineered. For independence is not an abstraction or an institution, far less the possession of a charter; it is a quality of character, a series of faculties put to their fullest use. It is total energy. One may engineer conditions more or less favorable to achieving independence, but even this straightforward and probably enlightened undertaking does not include its own justification. Only the work of art, which subserves the ancient principle that longest way round is shortest way home, fastens its eye on the ultimate objective; and instead of elaborately debating its own reactions to the social fact, creates new ones directly in the reader. It assumes a new freedom and a new responsibility, and places its own justification before a new court. What it aims to achieve is a sympathy which is conclusive and ultimate in one's awareness of what it means to have a human shape. Art does not necessarily prove, show, or debate anything; it simply reminds human beings of a human condition which, in its presence at least, is indefeasible. Like crime, art is revenge, like neurosis it is refuge, like dreams it is innocent, and like games

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delightful; but unlike anything else, it carries on its own forehead a complete human significance and expresses a complete human potential. If The Savage were intent on showing his superiority to the automatons, he would merely have to write a sonnet, or become the sort of person who could be imagined writing a sonnet. He would have to appear, that is, in a novel instead of a tract, and so be motivated by something richer and less schematic than sociological indignation. The most erudite sociology will not be much of an improvement over the most primitive, until his soul becomes creative. For creation is the only way of rising superior to one's surroundings that carries its own hallmark.

*The Charterhouse of Parma* is in these terms a strikingly successful novel, in that the changes which the hero's soul is shown undergoing are proportionate to the impact of the novel itself. Fabrizio del Dongo, his soul crystallized in prison, becomes capable of a true passion, which glows amid "the sordid pecuniary interests and . . . the colorless coldness of the vulgar thoughts which fill our lives," just as the passions of the novel itself achieve a special radiance among literary works. The novel is a work of insurrection, not merely against a political regime or a social discipline, but against an order of reality; its greatest achievement is not a lecture on the desirability of transcending a political mechanism, but the act of transcendence itself.

When one reflects on the general willingness of novelists to avoid the direct confrontation of individual and society;—and when, from the small number who achieve such confrontation, one subtracts those who derive from it nothing more than pathos, passivity, and self-pity, the achievement of Stendhal in *The Charterhouse of Parma* takes on an altogether special luster. The irresistibly ambiguous *esprit* of Cervantes flows through its pages; and one would have little reason for showing its superiority to *Brave New World* (it surpasses so many much better novels), if that extreme contrast did not lay bare the level of futility from which it abruptly rises. Among the heroes of the insurrectionary novel, Fabrizio should have a place with Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and Proust's narrator, Marcel, as victor rather than victim in the long, dark, and savage struggle with time and circumstance which has been the deepest concern of philosophical romancers since Cervantes.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

# American Preludes

1.

This isle hath many goodly woods and deer,
Conies and fowl in incredible abundance;
The woods, not such as you find in Bohemia,
Barren and fruitless, but the highest cedars,
Better than those of Libanus, and pines,
Cypress and sassafras and lentisk:
To them the sea winds owe their wafting spice.

Discharging our muskets
A flock of cranes, most white, arose by us
With such a cry as if an army of men
Had shouted together.

We saw not any of the people
Until, the third day,
In a little boat
Three of them appeared, and one of them
Went on shore, to whom we rowed.
He attended
Without any sign of fear.

When he had spoken,
Though we understood not a word,
Of his own accord he came boldly aboard us.
We gave him a shirt,
A hat, wine and meat, which he liked well.

The next day
Came divers boats, and in one of them
The King's brother.
His name was Granganameo,
The King is called Wingina,
The country, Wingandacao.

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The women wear their hair long on both sides,
The men on one; they are of color yellow;
Their hair is black, yet we saw children
That had very fair chestnut colored hair.

For an armor he would have engaged us
A bag of pearl, but we refused,
As not regarding it, that we might the better
Learn where it grew.

This discovery was so welcome into England
That it pleased her majesty
To call this country Virginia.

2.

The white walls
Undulate with sea shadows. In the fields
The cypresses stand up like somber flames,
And yellow roses tangle from the walls.

Vaquero, I have seen your ending days,
Looped in a lariat, dragged at the heels
Of the black horses.

Under the eucalyptus tree
There is the girl who waits for me,
Her brown feet stretched to the salt tongues of sea.

Cathedral, vessel of God, wait for me,
Where potsherds and faded roses
Are cast beside the wall, and cypresses
Weep, sad sisters.

Cathedral, vessel of the dead,
O cast off these white anchors, Miserere,
And spread your spinnakers Magnificat
Laudemus to the horizon!

Blessings perch there like birds,
Saints gather like gulls
For pecks of bread.
The bow is booming in the blood of Christ.

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But she does not weep, she does not chant Miserere,
Her eyes are green as the shallow sea,
The one who is waiting for me.

3.

Hudson, come down from your leaf-stroked cascades,
Angry so soon to be encased in ice,
Gone is the Sleeping Man and gone
The steamboat floating upstream like a swan,
But the calm sleep that raised these Palisades
To new, majestic augurs still persuades.

Green in summer; winter, white and cold;
The softest season neither young nor old,
Which two red Indians bring in,
Pocahontas in her painted skin.

The last Elizabethans reappear,
Court orange and fool's yellow. The bright air
Rasps the hunter's lungs; he walks peak-capped,
Flanneled, rubbered, wrapped,
His pockets bulging with fat shotgun shells.

Maple and berry dogwood, oak, are kings.
The axe is lively and your pale palm stings
While Echo claps her hands on the bare hill.
The scene is clear. The air is chill.

## West

*for J. R. S.*

On US 101
I felt the traffic running like a beast,
Roaring in space.

Tamalpais,
The red princess slopes
In honeyed burial from hair to feet;
The sharp lifting fog

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Uncurtains Richmond and the ridge
(With two red rubies set upon the bridge)
And curtains them again.

Ranching in Bolinas, that's the life,
If you call cattle life:
To sit on a veranda with a glass
And see the sprinklers watering your land
And hear the peaches dropping from the trees
And hear the ocean in the redwood trees,

The whales of time,
Masts of the long voyages of earth,
In whose tall branches day
Hangs like a Christmas toy.

On their red columns drowse
The eagles battered at the Western gate;
These trees have held the eagles in their state
When Rome was still a rumor in the boughs.

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ALAN FRIEDMAN

# The Search

THE ARRIVAL IN PARIS of his dead wife's sister brought him a new, unwanted hate. In his bedroom she was an alien presence. She seemed to smell of some irritating, oddly indelicate perfume, as though, he thought, she had carefully applied it to obscure whatever gentler, more feminine odors were secreted in the recesses of her body. The confined chamber of air, pressed down by the sloping eaves, had held till now only familiar odors: the animal smell of pajamas, the smell of sheets and pillows which reminded him sometimes of the sea, and the stale paperlike smell of cheap furniture. The eaves themselves, sweating a coat of moisture, seemed to add to this system of odors. A new scent had disturbed the arrangement. Pearce rolled over in bed.

The bedroom was perpetually cold. The stove managed to heat only the kitchen in which it stood. In the bedroom, water condensed on the cold plaster eaves. On the kitchen stove, a pot of boiling water gave up incessant vapor to the ceiling.

For two days before his dead wife's sister had arrived in Paris, Pearce had been running a fever. He met her at the train anyhow, a little unsteady on his feet. Clouds of steam gushed from the train's belly, the crowds struggled by him on each side. When he recognized her, as she stepped from the train onto the quai, when she flicked her hips around, and he saw her face, partly foreign yet intimately known, his burden of hate settled upon her. Inexorably, the family resemblance had marked her features. His accumulated hatred found, in this strong resemblance, sufficient excuse, sufficient outlet. Its weight, shifting suddenly to a faintly-known sister, caught Pearce off-balance, but willing. Their meeting was brief.

Sydney spent three days in Paris. On the fourth, she contrived to get Pearce to leave with her on a hasty trip into Brittany. She spent her days in Paris pursuing a round of enquiries into the circumstances of her sister's death. But Paris was cold, was in fact extraordinarily bitter, and people were tight-mouthed and in a hurry. From Pearce she could get little. He knew only the barest

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details—these she investigated—and moreover he was ill. She nursed him in her spare time. His apartment was small, unpleasant, but better than the utter isolation of her hotel room. The long line of his body, swelling the quilt hour by hour in a succession of shifting ridges, showed her a man struck down and made passive by tragedy. The spectacle was repugnant, it aroused in her contempt, but the very tension of that contempt made his sickroom more bearable than the blank squares of other rooms.

"Tea is ready," she called in to him, lifting the pot from the stove. She prepared the tea. In the bedroom, a few moments later, they drank it. Pearce sat up to drink, a heavy dark coat thrown around his shoulders.

"I've talked to some of Pierre's friends," she said.

"Friends?"

"They know him. Not well. Can't you tell me anything more about him?"

Pearce gulped the hot tea down his gullet. He could feel it enter his stomach, it was so hot. He repeated again, in the same words he had always used to Sydney: "He is a member of The Friends of Krishna. He rides a motorcycle."

Sydney got up, exasperated, and went to the window, where she stood sideways, looking out and drinking her tea.

Her presence in the room annoyed Pearce. The angular outline of her body, in clothes that were tailored with a flair, angered him. The ruff at her chest and throat, the flare of her jacket over her hips, the neat fall of the grey skirt down her legs, all were too clean and too precise for the shadow life that absorbed his days. Their lines, their stuffs, their stitching and pattern overrunning her body called to him and threatened to reawaken him.

"You're not sick," she said suddenly, turning upon him in anger.

Pearce smiled. "I have a hundred point five."

"You're in bed, horribly in bed. Get out of bed. Your fever will go away anyhow.

"Listen," she continued, coming closer and sitting on the edge of his bed, "never mind that. Probably you'd do better in bed. But I know where Pierre is." She paused to allow the effect of her words to reach Pearce. "I know where he lives. That is, I know where his parents live, and I know he is with them now.

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He may be staying there only another few days. After that nobody has any idea where to find him. Is your car available? Can you drive it in your condition?"

"Where do they live?"

"In Brittany, near Carhaix."

"Where?"

"Near Carhaix." She watched him closely. She had lied. She had learned the address of Pierre's parents, but she had no notion whatever whether Pierre himself was there now. And it would be incautious to telephone. The image of her sister flickered tentatively in her mind, but would not realize itself, would not make itself visible. Nevertheless, Pearce *should* go, she would see that he went, sick or healthy, to confront Pierre. "Well?" she queried.

"We'll leave tomorrow."

She had won. She had struck upon the one demand which could still be made on Pearce's existence.

They left Paris the next morning. At about four o'clock Pearce's fever began to bother him, but he drove on till almost six.

At the very start, in the morning, they had had some difficulty finding their way out of Paris. Following the wide boulevards that border the outlying sections of the city, they managed at last, despite a few false turns, to leave behind the sheltering tenement-houses lining their route, and the scurrying interfering traffic. They issued slowly into freer country. They skirted the palace at Versailles. The land flattened out. Even the hills were flatter than the heaving tenements, now behind, that reared their glassy eyes to the sun. There were few cars now. Pearce felt liberated. He eased into the seat.

As their distance from Paris drew itself out longer and longer, Pearce made an effort to reflect on the purpose of their trip—on *his* purpose, at all events. But his thoughts would not obey his desire. They carried him to the point where he recognized that he must see Pierre, but beyond that they would not march. He felt only a cramping resentment of his sister-in-law, intolerable that she should be sitting beside him! His resentment fixed itself, in fact, on her clothes, which she had specially chosen that day for car travel, and which in their unrelieved and simple tailored style, seemed to Pearce harsh, inhuman. He could not get his mind away from the conviction that she was unsexed and there-

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fore to be feared. At the bottom of a long hill along which the road seemed to stretch and unfurl itself above their heads like an overhanging cliff, he realized that his motives in this trip were not his own, that they belonged to the woman beside him, and he had a sudden uneasy inkling of where they might end. Up ahead on the road, a black dot silhouetted against the sky at the summit of the hill grew to the tiny figure of a man. Pearce wondered who stood there against the mottled sky, and glanced quickly at Sydney. His muscles tightened against the wheel and accelerator, as though he were restraining himself from striking a blow; the car shot more quickly ahead, and it was as if some enemy thought, offspring of the unsexed, unwomanly woman at his side, had stabbed him. His mind had become such a teeming cage of images he could not bear to face, that it was a relief to see the spot at the top of the hill take shape as a policeman whose hand was raised in a command: "Stop!" Pearce slowed down. He stopped.

The officer approached the car from Sydney's side and poked his helmeted head in at the window, asking Pearce what he thought he was doing driving up the middle of the road, and demanding to see his driver's license and *carte grise.*

With a start Pearce realized that he had been driving up the entire hill in the center lane of a three-lane highway. He handed over his papers and said, "We're foreigners."

The officer said nothing, took the papers, and stepped away from the car to read them. Sydney got out and began to converse with the patrolman. Pearce watched the smooth line of her back momentarily, but his eye was caught by the police motorcycle waiting at the side of the road, a black compact mass of details: cylinders, springs, wires, wheels, tanks. The door opened and Sydney got back in. The officer returned Pearce's papers and said, "The center lane is used only to pass other cars. Be careful. Otherwise you risk heavy penalties." He glanced admiringly at Sydney. "All right," he concluded, "go on. Goodbye."

Pearce started the car. He asked no questions, annoyed that he owed to Sydney the avoidance of a fine; to the fact, moreover, that someone had apparently found her attractive.

They stopped for a bite to eat in the early afternoon, and then continued westward. When Pearce's fever returned perceptibly to his body, he decided that it did not interfere with his driving,

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and he kept on, though more and more slowly. As night fell and Pearce's head grew painfully dizzy with the effort of concentration, they stopped in a small town, at the sign of a hotel. But only one room was available. At the second hotel, the only other in town, an incident occurred which shattered the prearranged pattern of their emotions.

They found the hotel with some difficulty on a side street and entered the door at which the sign hung, only to find a small, unpopulated café. Sydney, in apprehension, drew back as a large fat man entered suddenly from behind a curtain they had not seen. Yes, he said, they did have a room, yes, two rooms, but the hotel was located a few minutes from here. Another fat man entered. They whispered together briefly, and the first fat man said that "the car was ready." The soiled dinginess of the café had put Sydney's back up. In part her misgiving communicated itself to Pearce; in part an inner qualm of his own exerted its force against his tired passivity. He said, "Can we see the rooms first?"

"Yes," said the fat man, "I'll take you in my car."

"But we can drive there ourselves."

"Ah no, it is not far. I am going to take you."

Pearce's weariness yielded. The fat man's car was like a hearse, black, with a large empty compartment in the rear. Sydney shifted her knees from side to side, anxiously, and asked the driver his occupation. He was, he said, owner of the hotel and the café. The car raced downhill at a frightening speed through dark, narrow streets no wider than itself.

The hotel, only four short blocks away, was reached in a matter of seconds. They entered first a totally black court, bewildering in its unexpected opaqueness, and passed along a brief black alley, through a wooden door, and up two flights of rotten wooden staircase. The hotel had obviously not been used for a long time. The unrelieved darkness disturbed the edges of Sydney's thinking. Discipline put her through the required motions easily, but she wanted to run.

The keys the fat man had brought apparently did not work. They descended, and he indicated a dim room. "Wait in there for me," he said. "I'll find the right keys."

Pearce and Sydney looked in at large, badly-lighted, greying

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plaster walls. They went inside hesitantly. Behind them, the fat man slammed the door, and in answer crowds of grey-white bedsheets, suspended from the ceiling like thoughts of affliction, shivered in the breeze.

Sydney's eyes swung around. Her mind jumped forward and she realized, in an odd surge of anticipation, that she was about to become afraid. As the fat man's footsteps receded down the passage, she tried the door, and it refused to open. She was seized at once by fear of the unaccountable, of its power to lay hold of a situation, alter its course and very shape beyond recognition, snapping from within the most balanced plans by natural and therefore irrational causes. When she could she said, "The door's locked. Let's get out the window."

Pearce examined the door. "Don't be silly, it's an automatic lock, that's all. A mistake. He'll let us out when he comes back."

But dread generated its own energy. She went to the window. It was unlocked, she saw, and at ground level. "Do you have the car keys?"

"They're in the ignition."

She thought of their isolation, their money. Nobody knew where they were. In case of trouble, she thought, they would be stronger if separate. One of them could inform the police. Perhaps the other fat man was robbing the car. "I'm going," she said. She was intensely anxious, but under control.

"How will I decide about the rooms?" Pearce asked perversely.

"Decide by yourself." She left.

Pearce waited. The inside of a coal stove gleamed redly in the corner, and he stood there, rubbing his hands dryly together over it. Sydney's fear had been somewhat contagious, but at bottom he disbelieved. The fever in his brain had already jarred reality sufficiently, and he felt this irregular course of events to coincide with his expected version of an entangled world. Yet, convinced only of confusion and not of evil intentions, he remained apprehensive. Each unforeseeable, unwanted event added to his bewilderment, reinforced his belief in unlimited possibility; and with the slowing down of his reflexes and his attendant dizziness, he was like a confused caterpillar poked and shoved by a boy's stick, by an unseen assailant.

He huddled over the stove in perplexed doubt. Disbelief was

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characteristic of him. He had never been able to believe fully in his wife's death. Knowing it to be true, he still had never quite accepted it as irrevocable. He was, he knew, too weak to do so. He had therefore avoided, as much as possible, all but the necessary arrangements for her funeral. He had not gazed upon her in her coffin; he had not enquired into the details of the accident; he had not sought out Pierre. He had wished at all costs to avoid any final realization. And now, impelled by the ceaseless wish of her sister, he was being driven to the very castle of the enemy. Yet he felt forced to go, perhaps by the very fact of his inner disbelief. At odds with himself, therefore, wrapped in a fever, all things seemed equally disjointed, confounded. Every step seemed a mad approach to the enemy's stronghold, in a land of illogical shadows. Fearless, he wanted to run away.

While he stood there the fat man came back. He unlocked the door from the outside and came in, slamming the door. The sheets swayed. "Madam has left?" he said questioningly. Pearce nodded. "Well," he confided, "I've sent my boy to get the keys. Just wait. It won't be long." The hotel owner's bulky figure, in black, ill-fitting clothes, leaned over the stove too, blocking off the red glitter entirely, as though drawing it up into himself. Suddenly he said, "I have some other keys." He went to a small cupboard and withdrew a key ring. He let Pearce out, and together they remounted the stairs. But the new keys did not work. Halfway down again, they were met by a small boy of about twelve, who produced breathlessly and without a smile another ring of keys. They went upstairs again, and again the keys failed to open the door.

"Never mind," Pearce insisted over the owner's apologies. "I'm going. I don't want the room."

"Don't leave. Just one moment."

"Never mind."

"You can't leave after all this." He turned to his boy.

"I'm going."

"No, no, no, no, no, no." He whispered something in the boy's ear, and the child seemed to spring in one bound out through the hall window. "My boy will open it from inside."

Stunned by the boy's extraordinary disappearance, and obligated by the owner's requests, Pearce paused while the boy worked his way somehow around the outside of the building into the

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room. The door suddenly began to rattle. Inside the child cursed foully. He banged with sharp fury at the lock, and the door shook futilely. Pearce turned to go. "No!" shouted the owner. The door lurched open. In the difficult light from the small bulb at the ceiling Pearce made out a small bed, a chair, a *bidet,* a sink, and an overturned table. The soiled wall paper curled away from the wall in great patches. It was obvious to him at once that neither he nor Sydney would have any rest or peace of mind there.

He turned to go. "I don't want to take the room."

But the owner brushed quickly past Pearce down the stairs and turned, blocking the way. "No!" he said, his face screwed up as though he were about to weep. "Stop!"

Pearce hesitated. He was confused. "I don't want to take the room," he repeated.

The owner hissed at him. "I can't permit you to leave."

"I don't understand."

"That doesn't make any difference. You must take the room. It's a question of what's right." His fat face, two steps below Pearce, looked like an ugly, angry child's.

"I don't want the room."

All at once, all the lines of the owner's face twisted up into a smile. "Please," he said, giving the words great emphasis, as though this must settle the matter, "*I, I,* I *want* you to take the room. It's a *good* room. I will wait on you myself." He hesitated, expecting an answer. He added, "You will have everything."

Pearce's head hurt. He didn't want the room. It seemed so simple. How ridiculous to argue. "No," he said, dully.

The lines of the owner's face suddenly contorted in new directions. He regarded Pearce with the look of one who at last recognizes a traitor. He turned to the boy who still remained passively waiting on the landing above. "Come!" he shouted venomously. Then he turned again to Pearce, deliberately spat full in his face, and clumsily descended the stairs.

Shocked and totally unnerved, Pearce made his way downstairs wiping his face randomly with the back of his hand. When he reached the ground floor, the owner had disappeared. Pearce could hear the boy beginning to come down from the landing. He turned hurriedly out into the courtyard and groped his way through the darkness into the semi-lighted street.

He felt as if he had escaped from something terrible, and yet

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the night, even outside in the street, seemed to offer only momentary relief. He felt plunged and held down, as by a weight, in an unknown land, a sea bottom of half-familiar shapes and softened noises, in which he and the night were not wholly distinguishable, but mingled in large, uneasy movements. When he perceived Sydney running shakily towards him down the hill, he felt that they would collide, that their heavy, slow-moving strides were undeflectable in the liquid night.

They went back to the first hotel at which they had enquired and spent the night together in the one available room there. Pearce, whose mind did not admit of meditation, felt nevertheless hazily neutral toward Sydney. He ate a slight supper in the hotel dining room and retired at once to bed.

Sydney lingered over her meal. Her wait for Pearce at the car had been an ordeal from which she had not yet recovered. While she stood alone in the cold evening by the empty car, her brain had labored through an eternal paralyzed moment and conceived in fear the most impossible phantasms of his loss or her defeat. Now, piecing together the fragments of her will seemed an intolerable effort. Remembrance of her sister's life stung her till she almost cried, and still the picture of her sister's face refused to focus in her mind. Tenaciously she clung to her decision. Pierre *should* be brought to account. The vacuity of Pearce's existence embittered her, soured the motive of her intent. That she should be compelled to use, as an instrument for the work, a husk of manhood so vitiated and drained, was, she saw, hard. Yet the encumbrance itself sustained her, strengthened her. She pushed the untasted food from her. Her appetite, whetted by her anxious wait for Pearce, suffered itself to be denied. Appetite gave way to discipline. She would not want to eat until she had recovered, despite Pearce, despite Pierre, the full and blooded image of her sister.

Upstairs in the medium-sized room, well-appointed and brightly lighted, she prepared for bed. When she had entered and flicked on the light, she had found Pearce awake in bed, lying on his back, his wide, heated eyes turned up toward the ceiling. Occasionally they followed her movements in the room. She consulted a map, taken from her purse, and observed their position, estimated the time of their arrival tomorrow. Steeling her mind

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with this purpose, she nevertheless had difficulty in undressing, conscious of his open eyes upon her. When it came to her slip, she hesitated, gritting her teeth with a trace of possible humor, accusing herself of absurdity.

For Pearce the spectacle of this act came as an omen, almost as a justification. As Sydney shed her clothes, the resentment he had lodged in them shed itself from his shaky mind. As she removed her jacket and skirt, as she unbuttoned and carefully hung her blouse, he speculated on the advisability of turning away. But fascination held him. The harsh shell of the woman: he wanted desperately to see it destroyed, eaten away, leaving beneath it a creature he could cope with. He saw her hesitate, her hands upon her slip. She raised it and hung it neatly on a hook.

Pearce was shocked to see how thin she was in her underclothes. Her legs and arms were like a puppet's, pale spindles that worked quickly and delicately in their sockets. The pinched bones across her chest and her little stick-like ribs were startling. The frame showed strong and incorruptible; the body had wasted away.

He watched as she unfolded her pajamas, as she began to remove her underclothes; but her hands, fumbling behind her back for the catch, would not cooperate. She hurried at last to the light switch, and in the ensuing darkness found comfort.

In bed their isolation remained unrelieved by words. The bed was barely large enough for them to keep apart, and yet their separation was not difficult to maintain. Pearce fell easily asleep, while Sydney rocked herself slowly to sleep with mingled indignation and self-reproach.

At some unknown hour in the silence of the night, Pearce awoke, trembling, his body coated in hot sweat. His bones ached, desiring to move, but as he moved the cold air stung him unbearably. He lay awake against his will, bitterly aware of the wasted minutes, and of that oppressive fever that choked off his daily fulfillment in times of waking as well as sleeping. The face and body of his wife, as he had known her, drifted elusively before his mind's eye, forever unrealizable. The image passed from vagueness to further depths of vagueness, into obscurity. Totally unaware of the shadow-wife beside him, he slept.

In the morning they drove still further west, into the heart of Brittany, and Pearce found a measure of joy in the difficulties of

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driving. It was cold. On the road, in all spots not warmed by the sun, a veneer of ice slicked down the gravel, sometimes for distances of over half a mile, and as these were often difficult to see beforehand, and difficult to manage when seen, Pearce bent all his efforts to eliminate the insistent, incipient skids.

Sydney, whose clothes caught again today, like a dexterously managed shield, the many points of his hostility, sat fearless and inviolate in the front seat, intent upon the landscape. The brilliant greens of the fields, startling at this time of winter, gave the dominant note to the endlessly changing arrangement of shapes. Everything revolved in great circles on each side, the points of pivot fixed at the horizon, and everywhere the unbelievably green grass gave promise of spring. Yet along the borders of all the fields sprouted lines of weird, monstrous oaks, whose branches had been cut for firewood; they stood about in nakedness, mere black trunks covered with great bulbous knots. Distorted, limbless counterfeits, they suggested in the midst of the undying green another planet, ruined and tortured.

At times the road would sink between two walls of turf, heaved up on each side, and the landscape would disappear altogether, leaving the two travellers with a renewed consciousness of each other's presence and of the tension between them. Once, emerging from such a valley onto a plain where the road was free on both sides, the automobile began to skid on ice that had been slightly moistened by the morning sun. Pearce steered into the skid, trying to reduce its effect. But just as it seemed under control, the car slipped suddenly to one side. Pearce held the wheel. The rear end of the car scudded completely around, and the car went off the road, its direction exactly reversed. The turning wheels caught the pebbles lining the side of the road, and the car lurched forward, as though in one unbroken maneuver, onto the road, heading in the opposite direction. Unstrung, Pearce brought the car gently and circumspectly to a stop after several hundred feet. Sydney's hands still clutched the door and seat, and only slowly did her eyes and mouth resume their former shapes. She and Pearce relaxed by degrees, grasping the fact, with difficulty, that no damage had been done, that they and the car had merely been swung around. After several moments, Pearce reversed the direction again, and they continued west.

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They arrived at Pierre's home in the early afternoon. When they entered the small village near Carhaix they enquired the way and were told that they could hardly miss "the chateau" if they continued along and took the second turn on their left. The proper address turned out actually to be a chateau, small, but replete with towers and walls. In front of the main entrance a large exotic tree threw mossy bunches of tendrils, like green torches, wavily up into the air.

They were met at the door by a maidservant in a white Bretonne cap, who went to call Pierre's mother. When she arrived, Pearce introduced himself as a friend of Pierre's from Paris, an American. She seemed to recognize after a moment the name and nationality and said, "Ah, yes. Pierre has often mentioned you, and he has often said that you might come to visit us some day. And moreover, if I am not mistaken," turning kindly to Sydney, she continued, "you are his wife."

Pearce started, but Sydney, to whom the words were addressed, hesitated imperceptibly and then agreed. "Yes, you are right. Is Pierre at home now?"

"No, but we expect him back for dinner. Come in, please."

They followed her inside, Sydney rapidly calculating the advantages that her fortuitous lie might bring them, and Pearce thoroughly baffled and outraged by the deception.

Pierre's mother was a tall, whispering woman, who delicately wrung her hands together when she talked. Her hands and wistful voice recalled calamities already befallen, and others yet to come, that would sadly resemble them.

Inside they sat and talked for a while, about the house, the village, the land. Pierre was hardly mentioned. Once, when Sydney pressed the point, they learned that he was, at the moment, out for a ride, somewhere in the countryside on his motorcycle with "une amie".

Soon afterward they were shown to their room. Left alone in the padded silence, in a bedroom stitched and plump with brocades and pillows, Pearce wanted to cry out his indignation. Moved at last to a clear emotion, he nevertheless could not bring it to expression. The cruel discrepancy between Sydney's lie and the reality of his loss pained him. By what refined taste for mockery had she spoken, by what indelicate lust had she appro-

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priated him? He was too proud, too victimized by his own past, a past inexplicable to Sydney, to speak. He lay down on the airy softness of the bed's coverlet, sinking into its comforting embrace. Disdaining to question her, he composed himself for sleep. Gradually he shut off from his mind all thoughts of the usurper.

While he napped, Sydney brooded over his remains.

Tea was served in the late afternoon, downstairs in the large dining room. When Pierre's father entered the room, he seemed to be blown in by the wind, a beaten phantom in stray, unmatched clothes, held together by a white scarf at the neck and a long black overcoat thrown capelike over his shoulders. Instantly, Pearce was reminded of his own father; he regarded the old man with unaccountable recognition.

As soon as the father had entered, his benevolent charm exorcized the incipient tensions of their conversation, and it was not until Sydney asked whether they had any other children besides Pierre that the gloom foreshadowed in the mother's face actually sank in upon them.

"We have had two others," she murmured, in controlled confessional, "but they are no longer with us. The first died early. He was the most promising. Handsome, strong, always in the best of health, and he was generous, you know, considerate. And very intelligent. He was killed while at the University, in a motorcycle accident. Yes.

"And our girl," she went on. "She is now a nun. She has taken the vows in a very strict order. She writes us once a year, at Christmas time. We are not allowed to see her. Yes. She also was very promising. She was very active, always excited, enthusiastic, especially for the outdoor life. Sports and camping, yes, I remember. You know, she was elected regional director of the Scout movement, a high honor, before she was twenty. She was always extremely popular. Then gradually she changed, she drew herself into herself. All the life went out of her, and we lost her."

The conversation, after this, sank irrecoverably. Sydney, greatly affected by this intrusion of suffering, but not so much out of sympathy with the mother's defeat as in dread of her own unleashed, unbounded enmity toward Pierre, compelled herself to

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enquire: "And Pierre, do not his religious tendencies alarm you?"

"Ah no, ah no. Thank God, he has none."

Afterwards, when she had taken her leave, a great change came over her husband. He seemed to shake himself loose, as though suddenly released from a cramping posture; a careless, almost slovenly abandon appeared in him, which gradually showed signs of becoming extravagant.

The immediate effect on Pearce was a renewed feeling of kinship with him. The conversation grew random, gay. Yet although he tried, Pearce could not shake off the persistent impression that the disorderly man before him was his own father. His fever had begun to take its toll on his senses now, but pleasantly. Exhilaration, like a draught of pure oxygen, spurred him. "Tell us about your family tree," he said.

"It is a strange tree," replied the father, "a mongrel. It stems originally from the Orient—though who can say? I think it must surely have begun in Eden and from there, of course, it may have spread all over the earth. In recent times, however, within the memory of history, it is known to have flourished in the East, thence transplanted perhaps by the guilty conscience of the West into this peculiarly Occidental soil that we call France, where, as you no doubt noticed upon your arrival at this house, it has taken root and grown marvelously well. Did you observe, as you came in, that it is now taller than our house itself?"

Realizing his mistake, Pearce drew in his breath. Pierre's father, his red cheeks glowing, threw off his coat with a shrug, revealing a suit in which all the pockets—side, front, and rear—displayed protruding handkerchiefs, as though the man himself were only a scarecrow built of rags, with the stuffing escaping at every vent. The resemblance to Pearce's father was so marked that Pearce became alarmed.

"When the *Tedeschi* marched from Deutschland, they were very impressed by our tree. They descended upon our house as if it had some unique attraction for the Nazi mentality and paused inevitably to admire our tree. They forced our family to live in the barn, throughout the Occupation, with the animals, while they lived here," and he waved one arm, "in this house. They often said they were going to cut the tree down, but no doubt they were afraid, for to speak frankly, it is really the Tree of

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Knowledge out there. But on account of its soft, rope-like branches, too weak to support anything but its own airy plumes, it is nicknamed *Le Désespoir des Singes.*"

His eyes bulged. His two listeners sat entranced. "Perhaps Pierre will take you tomorrow to see the many bottomless pools and deep mine shafts, filled with water, in which the bodies of many *Tedeschi,* murdered by our people during the Occupation, lie liquidly rotting away."

Sydney fidgeted, shifted her eyes guiltily, as though in disobedience to a respected hypnotist, and sensed uncomfortably the terrible pressure, as in the furthest depths of the sea, of the house into which she had pushed her way. She felt justified. Life, existing under such pressure, seemed capable of complicity. Her rash daring seemed less rash under such conditions, and as Pierre's father continued to speak she sensed the sharpened beat of Pearce's dormant heart; she felt herself less and less the fool.

"Or perhaps," he went on, "a more pleasing diversion to you would be our cliffs, not far away, they can be reached in a morning's drive—the cliffs of Brittany. They overlook the sea, a straight drop down into the ocean. Many a mother has lost her son or daughter there in a high wind, for there is no protection—save human agility—on the path that skirts the edge. But on a nice day, if the atmospheric conditions are good, the cliffs are so high that one can actually see America, yes, the country and the city you came from," nodding swiftly at them, "New York, and the torch of the Statue of Liberty.

"You are both, I believe, from New York, or so Pierre has told us. We have heard much about you, and of your sister too."

They both started. Where had he heard of Sydney? He had nodded at Sydney when he spoke, but Pearce spoke out before her, quickly. "My sister-in-law? You have heard of her?"

"Ah yes. Indeed yes. She is, my son has confided to me, the only woman he has ever taken with him for long rides on his motorcycle."

The image of his wife's death jumped into his eyes, and momentarily blinded, he groped for explanation.

In swift pretense Sydney replied, "Yes, I know."

Pacing about, the old man continued, "He was, unless I am mistaken, quite occupied until recently in teaching her various

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Yoga techniques; in particular, I believe, abdominal control and the art of meditation.

"Perhaps you would be interested to observe a demonstration of a light stage of trance," he said, discontinuing his pacing, and deftly taking up a stance on the floor, alongside the sofa, balancing on his haunches, his arms folded. He composed his face. "My son has been trying for a long time to teach me his own trance techniques, but I prefer my own. I have no doubt that his are better, more philosophically sound. But I was taught this method so long ago, years before Pierre was ever born, in Indo-China while I was stationed there, and I am too old to follow my son's lead." His voice trailed off and the magic light in his eyes, that had so illuminated them during his preceding talk, faded.

After a moment during which Sydney and Pearce looked on horrified, he said in a small voice, "You may leave at any time. I will wake of my own accord later." Then in a voice that seemed hardly his own and devoid of significance, he directed them "not to mention Pierre's Yoga practices to his mother. She knows and understands mine. She knows nothing of Pierre's." He stopped, as if searching for words, about to go on. But nothing more happened. It was as if a human gate had closed on the world. After a while it became evident that the father's consciousness had utterly escaped from the room. To what spheres it had fled, what shapes or utterances it was chasing in that void, the drying mask of his face gave no hint.

Sydney and Pearce stared alternately at each other and at the balanced corpse. Pearce had been struck dumb. The unwanted tissue of confused identity obstinately weaving its way around him, and the precipitous refugee before him, vanished beyond pursuit to nowhere, were so many blows aimed at his head. He reached about for support, the fever thickening his world. He turned to the door and left, going straight to the silence of his padded room where he lay down, taut and hot, on the bed.

Into his distempered confusion entered the image of his wife's death. The corpse he had never seen drew his weary senses, and he found himself, breathing hard, in the coffin with her. On the bed where his own body lay, it shook in paroxysms. In the coffin he lay still.

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He had not, of course, seen the accident itself, when she had fallen off, her head upon a stone, in the last ceremony of discarded flesh. That grimace had been reserved to Pierre. Witness of her ignominious failure to go on living, Pierre had remained in Pearce's mind an untouchable. But Pearce himself, performer of her last rites, had in this indirect fashion experienced enough of death to harden all his extremities; even those inner parts that never directly touch the world had gelled; the intricate swirl of living had come to rest as a dumb, ponderous filling-up of interior space.

And now the fictitious, final image of his wife's body quickened him. It mastered him, focussed the supreme attention of his soul, and drew him on into the questionable intimacy of the coffin, into a future and unsuspected ecstasy of violence.

As he lay thus culpable, in the first pains of his own fate, Sydney watched the unchanging features of the father's face. She waited for a long time, incredulous and impatient, scarcely admitting to herself that she was trying to out-wait him. At last she wandered outside, thickly bundled in warm clothes, into the gardens and orchards that stretched extensively behind the chateau. The air was cold, and growing dark. She walked about, sitting here and there, plotting her stratagem. To face Pierre bluntly, as soon as they three were alone, was imperative. And with the truth. She had met before, in Paris, with similar confusions as to the identity of her sister and herself. Her investigations had uncovered little else besides this confusion and the incomprehensible circumstance that nobody had been able to locate any witnesses. Sydney considered this again. She considered facing Pierre in various ways, with or without Pearce. Perhaps the ultimate action, as she had suspected from the start, would have to be his. With darkness closing in her field of vision, she sat on a stone wall under the Monkey's Despair. Its elusive torches made an area of deeper shadow where she sat, and she tried momentarily to fathom the riddle of the two trees in Eden.

While Pearce upstairs on his bed passed from thoughts of his dead wife to grating remembrance of what he now had left of her: the family resemblance in the dried shell he knew as Sydney, and thence to sleep; Sydney's thoughts in turn passed from her-

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self and Pearce to the remembrance of her lost sister as she had known and loved her. Her fingers moved cautiously across her knee as she recalled the contours of her sister's body, the full, firmly-strung flesh, soft yet charged with something of the dancer's tension, and roundnesses that on her small frame were full but light; and still the remembrance of her sister's face that she now sought, would not come to her. Ann's seriousness, that had often held her face intent and rapt as a listener, her lips quivering to share the speaker's meaning, had been in the nature of a double fate: she had been too prone to defeat, sensitive on all sides to another's unhappiness, so sensitive that her soul could be borrowed, for good or evil, and often not returned till damaged; but this singular fate had had its equivalent counterpart in the rush with which she leapt to meet impinging joy, whether beating on her senses from the natural world or in the intricate demands of human beings. Sydney recalled the excitement in Ann's voice and the skip in her walk as she had last seen her crossing a bridge beneath trees. Unsure, questioning herself, Ann had sought shelter in the rough bark of trees, in the harsh surfaces of giant rocks, and, perhaps not so strangely, in the benevolence of men. Pure in love, she had been the first to hate. Such heedless love for particular men and women transformed its bearer into victim. She had, in the end, become Pierre's victim. Too openly participant in his cunning needs, she had lost her feeling for the workings of the living process—in this feeling Sydney remembered her best, in her frank rejoicing in the sheer currents of life—and had fallen beneath Pierre's unfathomed treachery.

But Ann's face would not take shape in Sydney's mind. In all these webbed remembrances she still could not recapture the features she had once known.

*

They had to wait a long while that evening for Pierre to come. They had all gathered in the dining room: Sidney and Pearce, and Pierre's mother and father. For the father had reawakened from his trance shortly before Sydney had returned to the house. Pierre had been expected some time before dinner. By the time the hour for dinner had arrived and passed, his mother was genuinely upset. Sitting in one corner of the large room, the table

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set and laden with food, Pearce and Sydney grew tense as they watched the streaks and shadows on the mother's face, shifting as her head shifted slightly with the faintest night-noise, hearing in every faithless, betraying sound the distant approach of his motorcycle. When three-quarters of an hour had passed beyond the family's usual time for dinner, it became unbearably difficult for the guests to continue to witness the mother's condition. As she showed no desire that anyone should begin to eat before her son returned, Pearce and Sydney went upstairs to their room. They had not been there long before the roar of a motorcycle, loud even in the distance, slowly split the night. When the motor had sputtered to a stop in front of the house, Sydney stood by the window in their room, which overlooked the main entrance to the chateau, and guardedly watched the path. Although the walk was largely obscured by the plumes of the Tree of Knowledge, a small area was visible directly in front of the large door, and there, after a few moments, she saw in the poorly-lighted darkness two figures—a large, bulky figure in a helmet, short fur-edged jacket, and pants tucked into boots; and a short, light figure, similarly dressed, but wearing a skirt. They passed under the portico, and Sydney went silently out onto the stair-landing to listen as they were let in. She heard nothing, however, beyond a few indistinguishable voices, male and female.

Only five people were present at dinner. Whomever Sydney had seen with Pierre did not, at any rate, eat with them. Pierre himself seemed to take it quite naturally that Pearce and his "wife" should be guests to dinner. He greeted them pleasantly, if a little shyly, and conversed in controlled, reticent phrases. No mention was made of the accident, and Pearce found it more and more difficult to believe that his wife was dead and had died in the presence of this gentle, slow-speaking man.

Pierre was strikingly large. His head especially was oversized and heavy; already, though he was only in his early thirties, his hair had begun to grey. A slight charming smile would sometimes light his features, yet timidly, and then sink back into his otherwise closed unseeing face. This heavy and rounded head, reminiscent of the huge stone heads of Buddha common in the Orient, rested on a huge frame. Yet despite his bulk, it was apparent from certain of his ways of gentle motion that Pierre was

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deceptively weak. Though not fat, he was not muscular. His heavy body rested where he sat or stood as if it had sunk slowly down through some thickening fluid and come to rest on floor or chair in ponderous and delicate equilibrium. When his arms moved, a fragile mechanism inside, as of threads and pulleys, seemed to give him his precarious energy. Sydney wondered how he was able to ride his motorcycle.

Dinner passed without incident in a round of dishes, proffered and accepted, and conversation that was polite and well-guided by Pierre's father. The father had suffered no visible effects from his late journey out of awareness. The mother, relieved by Pierre's return, played the role of gracious hostess in a manner that gave no hint of her recent misgivings: no word was uttered pertaining to Pierre's motorcycle expedition. Pearce, intent upon Pierre, in whom he could find no trace of discomfort at their meeting beyond a continual shyness that seemed integral to his nature, had recovered from his feverish sleep and was eager to participate in the reality of a cheerful meal. But reality seemed stubbornly denied to him. Again and again, by some disconcerting, freakish mental leap, it seemed to him that he was Pierre and that Pierre was he. It was, he knew, absurd. Yet repeatedly Pearce found himself sitting inside Pierre and struggling violently to choke off a current of guilt for Ann's death that rose within him to condemn him. The meal, in any case, seemed to go on cheerfully. Several times it occurred to him that there was something bizarre in the very normality of the meal, as if they had all invested it with a genial quality, which it did not rightfully possess, by a mutual conspiracy of denied identities. But this thought just brushed his consciousness and, with a flick of his eyelids which seemed to set the image "right" again—of five diners partaking of nourishment and engaged in pleasant intercourse—the other image, of grotesque unspeakable specters busied in mutual cannibalism, vanished.

Once Pearce said, as he put down his glass of dry white wine, "I see, Pierre, you don't drink."

"No," Pierre replied, "I do not think I would like to, but in any case I cannot: it is bad for my heart. I have a weak heart. It doesn't interfere with my activities much, except in small things like drinking and in the fact that I cannot participate in

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strenuous physical activity. But certainly I have as a result not been obliged to perform military service." His tone was quiet, restrained.

Her face alert, Pierre's mother added, "I wish he wouldn't ride a motorcycle. It's so dangerous for his heart."

His father said, "Pierre's heart condition is a disappointment to me. I look back upon my military service with pleasure. It was a man's life. It was the happiest time I ever had."

Later on he reiterated his suggestion that Pierre should take his visitors to see the cliffs of Brittany the following morning, and it was agreed that the three of them would, if the weather was good, drive out there.

After dinner, as though by prearrangement, Sydney and Pearce were left alone in the parlor with Pierre. After some moments of silence during which Pierre's gentle smile came and went several times, Sydney brought herself to say abruptly, "What was your relationship with my sister?"

"I was her teacher," Pierre replied gravely.

Pearce turned uncomfortably, beseechingly, to Sydney. "All right, really," he said. He felt that it was he himself, and not Pierre, who was about to be drawn out.

Pierre sat stolidly, balanced on the edge of the sofa, regarding the others out of convex, unblinking eyes.

"What did you teach her?" Sydney questioned.

Pearce stood up, objecting. "We don't have to talk about that. This isn't the best moment to bring it up, is it?" Sensing the imminence of a sharp change in the atmosphere of the room, he exerted all his strength to prevent the past from falling in upon them.

Pierre put his thumbs together, and his hesitant smile, in no way offensive, returned to his long lips. "You want to know whether I murdered your sister," he said and drew in his breath. Pearce sat down again limply in his armchair. "I did not," Pierre continued. "However, I recognize that I had a part in her death. We all had a part in her death, you know, myself, you, and you. But whereas you two have been transformed by her death and are in that sense results of her death, I myself was the instrument, or rather,—" he paused, meditatively, his round eyes searching for a more precise definition, "the method: the process. And I am in no way changed."

A little surprised by the alacrity with which Pierre had divined

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her intention and entered into the thick of it, Sydney was nevertheless relieved. She felt it would now be simpler to advance.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked.

"You are this gentleman's wife," Pierre replied without hesitation.

"And whom did you kill?" she asked.

"Your sister," he said.

Pearce stiffened in his chair. This admission struck him from within. He suffered the vertigo of the waker, the cruel rush of light on the eyes of the newly-born. It was as if, in the difficult process begun by Sydney's arrival in Paris, of tearing the web from his heart, the first significant rip had just now been made.

As for Sydney, her horror at Pierre's facile admission was mild in comparison with her renewed relief: her strategem had worked. In this battle of wits she had pitted her speed against Pierre's poise, and she had succeeded. In the midst of her success, however, she was confused: Pierre seemed actually not to know that the woman he had killed had been Pearce's wife.

"Do you realize," Pearce said, still trying desperately to turn from the unfaceable terror, "what you have just admitted?"

"Exactly," Pierre answered at once. "I said that I killed your wife's sister, in the sense in which I defined my role before. I was the process by which she was annihilated. In that sense, and in no other, I was her killer, and I am prepared to admit that and take the consequences. But if you choose to interpret my admission in a crass sense, as though I had murdered your sister-in-law, I must deny that I had any such relation to her death."

"Then you did not kill her?" Pearce muttered. His head had begun to pound with the quickened tempo of fever.

Pierre hesitated, searching for a definition. "I was responsible for her death," he said.

Under the strain, Pearce found it difficult to think. He felt directly, without being able to explain it to himself, that Pierre's apparent admission was an accusation, or rather was an admission that included himself, Pearce, in its force. He struggled to focus his judgment.

Sydney, however, in no way put off by Pierre's qualification, took his words as a stark confirmation of the hunch that had carried her from Paris to Brittany. She proceeded carefully, repeating a question: "What did you teach my sister?"

"Discipline," he answered, "meditation, and death. The arts of

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life." His great head bent forward, and he closed his eyes. "She was the best pupil I have ever had. There was something in her nature, some unpracticed urge to discipline which I believe had previously run scattered and vindictive through her life, and which I was fortunately able to summon up and mold. That streak of discipline hardened. Had she not died, she would have triumphed immeasurably. Her death was my error: I tested her beyond the breaking point."

In his armchair Pearce trembled and asked, "What did you teach her, specifically, exactly what was it?"

"Abdominal control for one thing. Control of the voluntary musculature and to some degree of the autonomic muscles. We concentrated, as I say, in the abdomen and pelvic regions and were just advancing, when she died, into some progress with her parasympathetic nervous functions in those areas. Largely we used breathing techniques, and these were also employed for purposes of meditation. We had achieved remarkable success with unconscious control, under self-induced trance, of the voluntary muscles.

"In meditation she was particularly strong. Yes, remarkably gifted. She would sit for hours, sometimes for nearly a day, in unbroken meditation. This is highly unusual for a beginning pupil. We often meditated together, sitting for many hours on the floor of my study, and sometimes she meditated alone while I checked her breathing and other physical controls. Afterwards we would occasionally verify the course and content of her meditation, examining the degree of recession of the levels of her consciousness. In these sessions she showed remarkable insight. Her delicacy of understanding, the accuracy with which she could define her striking loss of awareness and apply its content to future attempts at reduction, was very rewarding to me, her teacher. I grew quite fond of her, you know. She was a constant pleasure to me."

His eyeballs bulged under the still, closed lids. His knees jutted rigidly into the room. "She was an excellent pupil. She had, I am sure, achieved before her death a narrowing-down, a level of consciousness, a point of controlled thinking, that I feel justified in describing as genuinely non-discursive."

"And trips on the motorcycle," Sydney interposed ironically, "were those part of her training?" She was surprised to find her-

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self in perfect command of herself, though her thoughts were acidly harsh and her body showed signs of trembling. Apparently her arduous effort at preparation had stood her in good stead.

Pierre, at her question, snapped remarkably to his feet, his legs unbending, and elevating his heavy body effortlessly, in a smooth, will-less motion. Afterwards he opened his eyes. "You must first understand the function of a motorcycle in my own discipline. Then you will understand her accident." He began to pace the floor in sure steps. "The motorcycle is a convenience, but it is all I have that serves my purpose. Any other machine would do, but it must be a *machine*—without a will, reasonably difficult to operate, and capable of rapid motion through space. The motorcycle has the additional advantage of requiring, especially in the trance-state, a high degree of balance—of swift sensitive adjustment to the changing conditions of momentum and gravity—in the regions of the pelvis and thighs. I often ride the machine while in a state of submerged, meditative awareness,—which is a special state of trance, not to be confused with deeper forms—ride it, as I say, on country roads. I prefer the night, because it is more difficult, but I have not as yet attempted driving through city streets in this state. While the corporeal person is in swift motion through the three dimensions of space, you understand, the meditative mind remains stationary in thought, controlling at the same time the muscular adjustments and reflexes of the body under difficult and rapidly shifting physical conditions. This is the purpose to which I employ that mechanism.

"I was not, of course," he continued in even balanced paces across the carpet, "foolish enough to give your sister such a trial. That would have been preposterously difficult for a beginner. I did, however, allow her to ride, in gradually reduced levels of awareness, on the back seat of the machine while I drove it. At first we travelled only on country roads. The day she died was the first on which we rode through the city. Her balance was superb. She mastered the complex demands of the traffic. Stops and starts were no great problem to her. In fact, in that last sudden stop, the most urgent and dangerous of them all, in which a large truck rode directly at us, and we screeched to a stop just as the truck passed in front of us,—in that unusually abrupt change of momentum, she retained perfect mastery of her body and came

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to rest in perfect coordination with the almost instantaneous stop of the machine. It was only afterwards that she fell off. What effect the demands of that sharp physical shock had had on her motionless psyche, I cannot say. At all events, immediately after we had come to a stop, she fell off sideways. Her body went limp, and she slipped off to the right in one continuous movement, striking her head on the curb."

He stood still, in a corner of the room, his head next to an electric bulb in a wall-candlestick that threw his bent enlarged shadow-head on the wall and ceiling opposite. Pearce rocked mutely in his chair, a victim of the story. Fever suffused his brain. Sydney suffered the story to rouse a new premeditated contempt for Pierre, as she weighed his sins and computed her judgment.

Pierre continued. "The experiment had failed. Or so I thought at first. I stood there, in realization of my defeat, in a good deal of irritation, and trying to calculate the cause of the error. I felt, I should tell you, at least at first, as if she had betrayed me.

"Medical opinion, I suppose, would no doubt hold that her death was instantaneous upon the concussion to her skull. It remains however a possibility, in my opinion, that she was dead before she fell; that her death, in other words, was the direct cause of her relaxing of control and of her slipping off the machine. Now as a state of shock is not possible, at least in its usual form, in a state of trance, it is possible that the extraordinary degree of control necessitated by my sharp stop had plunged her into the ultimate recessive level—or rather point—of consciousness: namely, death. If that is so,—and I see no reason to doubt it in view of her unparalleled talent in that area,—then she achieved, in her perfectly controlled death, what others achieve in death only once in many thousands of years. She achieved an eternal life, the true, the deathless death." He paused. "It is possible, at least."

"Do you know," Sydney proceeded coldly, "that the woman you murdered was this man's wife?" She waved the crook of her elbow toward Pearce. "Do you know that I am his murdered wife's sister?"

Pierre stared at her briefly, then at Pearce for a few moments. He turned away. "I did not know," he replied. "Was her name not Ann?"

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"It was!" Pearce shouted suddenly. He stood up. "She was my wife!"

"I did not know," Pierre repeated simply. "But I did not, in any case, murder her. I do not disclaim responsibility. But I did not, as you suggest, murder her. I consider that inasmuch as she engaged of her own accord to take lessons from me, and inasmuch as my disciplines were never forced upon her but voluntarily participated in, I am no more responsible in a causal sense—" and here he walked gravely up to Pearce, "than you."

Pearce was tempted to push him down, for the precarious balance of his oversized body on his delicate legs was almost irresistible. But confused by the thrust of Pierre's hinted accusation, he hesitated.

While he hesitated Pierre spoke again. "I do not know," he said, "whether you believe in the transmigration of souls. Many people do. I do." He turned away. "If I am wrong, and Ann did not achieve the ultimate plunge into eternal Life, she is perhaps still alive in this world. Perhaps the thought can comfort you. I don't know.

"Is there anything else I can tell you?" he added.

"No," Sydney answered. "I think not."

Pearce stood in silence, shaken.

Pierre turned to leave. Sydney said, "Shall we go tomorrow, as your father suggested, on that trip?"

"I should like to," Pierre replied, a touch of his quiet smile returning hesitantly, but with pleasure, to his heavy features. "I think you have not understood. Perhaps I could explain further."

"Perhaps," she said.

"Ah yes. I hope so. Good night." He stalked massively from the room and shut the door.

Upstairs in their room Sydney consulted her map again, as she had done the night before, estimating the distance to the tip of Brittany, while Pearce, nearly exhausted, went to wash in the bathroom. What bothered her most was the unexplained presence in the chateau of another person. She had meant to ask Pierre directly, but had forgotten. Was it, she asked herself, another of Pierre's pupils? "Une amie." The thought was frightening. Was there another woman being conducted half-alive on these nightmare journeys? She thought of that skirted figure as she had seen

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it enter the house with Pierre, and wondered suddenly if all the circumstances of her sister's death could have been a lie—a monstrous experiment of Pierre's. The thought was irresistible. Perhaps her sister was not dead; perhaps the woman she had seen had been her sister. Hate, fiercer than before, welled up in her against Pierre. Knowing Pierre, the idea seemed possible, but fantastic. She dismissed it. It was too blinding.

When Pearce returned, she left, and he began to undress for bed. His mind was steadier now that the trial was over, more whole, though not by any means clearer, than it had been earlier that evening. The undefined issue of Pierre's guilt still oppressed his movements. Admittedly not comprehending all of Pierre's explanation—or had it been, he thought, an apology?—he felt nevertheless obliged to decide his guilt. Anger welled up in him every few seconds, only to sink bewildered, unfaced by any target. Unwanted questions demanded answers. Were he and Pierre victim and torturer, distinct and separable, or had they been impossibly confused by an accident of birth? Twins, perhaps, of a careless sire, they might well have been spawned, he shakily saw, in a single lust, soul to soul, tracking each other down to the final blood sacrifice. Implicated in Pierre's offering, he could not bring himself to strike, as Cain struck Abel, merely because his brother's offering had proved more acceptable to God. Yet they seemed thrust now to the lip of the abyss, where judgment was necessary.

He hung his clothes on a chair, and thoughtfully unfolded his pajamas. He looked uncertainly about the room. Their talk with Pierre had ended strangely. Although the conversation had pointed unceasingly and terribly to his wife's death, the result had been paradoxically upsetting, a blow aimed from an unseen angle. In the wake of the mysterious workings of Pierre's mind, the previously unreal, impossible idea that Ann's supposed death was a fiction—of Pierre's making, aimed at some undisclosed, esoteric end of his—had for the first time become real, perhaps too real, too possible. Until now, the thought had been an untenable extravagance, based on despair and the fortuitous fact that there had been no witnesses. He had, it was true, never seen her body, but that had been a voluntary refusal. At least he had considered it so at the time. Perhaps, he decided, the idea was

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fantastic, but in view of Pierre's demoniac subtlety, he clung now, without quite knowing why, to the possibility that his wife was still living, perhaps a partner in Pierre's conspiracy, perhaps with Pierre now in that very house.

The idea, however, was too intensely disturbing to be entertained for any length of time without confirmation. And even in that case, he reasoned, Pierre must have sinned immeasurably. In bed, cradled in the cushiony mattress and surrounded by quilts, Pearce demanded of himself what path he should take. Paralyzed, powerless, he swept his fevered eyes about the room unceasingly until Sydney returned, freshly washed, and shut the door. As he fixed his gaze on her, he felt sharply and surely that the barbs that hovered between them must first be blunted, and that he could achieve his quest—which was, after all, so intimately their quest—only if united with his wife's sister. That it was reserved to him to act, he clearly saw, but to act alone, without ally, would be an inglorious war whose foreseeable end would be the ravage of the wretched victor.

While he lay thus pondering his needs, she faced him with the question, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to think. Tomorrow we'll do something."

Relieved to hear him speak at all and resolved not to repeat the foolish timidity of the previous night, she began to undress for bed, easily, calmly, without hesitation.

Watching her, Pearce felt again the same fascination, as the clear light revealed that beneath the casement of clothes in which she padded stealthily with many motives through the day, a woman walked. The small pile of clothes that grew at the edge of the bed uncovered an indubitable humanity that, thin as her flesh was stretched, gave access and hope.

This time she did not hesitate at her slip and did not stop at her underclothes. Pearce was genuinely relieved by her unbroken motion, carried thus to nakedness, and yet again was shocked, and even more distressed this second time, by the piteous want of flesh—now that clothes were gone—to cover the framework of her bones. It grieved him to be witness to this poverty. Her face was and had always been so like his dead wife's that friends had often been unable to tell the sisters apart; yet the difference between Sydney's body and the clearly remembered body of his

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wife was so striking, despite the resemblance between their faces, that it held him, almost appalled him. He could not help remembering, although he struggled against it, that his dead wife's breasts had been more swelling—these before him were unsexed, unmothered—and that her hips had been more lush—these angular hips afforded no avenue. He squirmed to bear these thoughts. Yet he was comforted, as she hung up her clothes, as she found and put on her pajamas, by the unbridled honesty of his gaze, realizing that in this cold vision he had achieved an unhoped-for contact with the enemy.

She switched off the light and got into bed. Pearce, moved despite himself and thus compelled to speak, said, "Good night."

"Good night," she said and rolled thoughtfully over on her side, searching for a face.

When, out of his peopled dreams, Pearce awoke again in the middle of that night, it was as if some commotion, protracted and clumsy, whether in his head or in his actual room and bed—he could not say which—had disturbed his sleep and gradually wakened him. When finally he awoke, the room was silent. In the muddy torpor of his half-sleep, in the confused meandering awareness that troubled his brain, battling the unwanted wakefulness that had thrust him unsuccessfully up out of the dark night, he turned. Had there been, his heavy thoughts demanded, some noise at the door? He realized dimly that someone had entered the room. There had been a struggle alongside him in the bed, summoning him from sleep. His fingers ran along the arm at his side. His response was immediate: the arm was unmistakably his wife's. Hovering in this thick moment, he embraced and kissed her. He did not for a moment question that it should be his wife. Under his fingertips he squeezed the inner parts of her arm: it was Ann's arm, soft and tense. Under the pressure of his hand the resilient ample flesh slid over her rib-case and slid in the small of her back and over her hips. The neat crest of her belly warmed his palm. Her long unending kiss held him; he sank and unwound between her scattered thighs in complete and fathomless union.

In the morning he rejoiced to see her head on his pillow. They sat up in bed together, with a rush of gladness, seized by the inexplicable panic of good fortune. Conspirators now in happiness, they rose, washed, and dressed, unable to disguise—yet anxious to

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do so—the most extreme, most profound amazement. Pearce could not understand what had happened. Plausible hypotheses multiplied fertilely in his mind, and every other moment he found himself on the point of demanding an explanation. Realizing that she would certainly reveal the details of her reappearance as soon as she felt it to be right, nevertheless he had the utmost difficulty in restraining himself. It was only by virtue of his intense joy at her rediscovery that he managed to avoid pressing her for answers. In this elated, uncomprehending spirit, he heard her familiar laughter sing through all their busy love, and trembled with the anticipation of a final crime.

Who, in that miraculous reunion, had been the most intrepid conspirator, dissembled best, pilfered most—Pearce could not say. Too overjoyed to ponder, he watched Ann's small figure tramp gracefully across the room, watched her brush her hair with supple sweeps of the arm, watched her take the sun's hot blessing on her skin, watched her bound to the window in furious delight at the rich leafy spectacle, and especially at the flaming plumes and crusty branches and bark of the Tree of Knowledge.

She tiptoed at last to the mirror on the wall. She questioned it and received answer. Earnestly and gratefully, she regarded to the full her face, as a kinsman might once have probed the face of Lazarus risen from the tomb. Satisfied, she tiptoed away.

They went that morning, as they had planned, to see the cliffs of Brittany. Pierre led the way on his motorcycle and they followed behind in the car.

Pierre's mother had said, "Please, Pierre, you know it isn't good for your heart. The doctor warned you against high places." Of all her family the least acquainted with shadow disciplines, she seemed to Pearce the most protracted sufferer.

But Pierre silenced her by a look directed at his father which caused the old man to say to her, comfortingly, "He rides well. He's getting stronger. Don't worry. He'll be back soon enough."

Pearce was gratified to observe that Pierre's mother and father were both struck by the change in his wife. They commented on it with mingled surprise, humor, and congratulation. They asked her again and again whether she really was the same woman they had dined with last night. They were pleased. They put it down to the change of air. As for Pierre himself, he only smiled. Care-

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fully inscrutable, he made no comment. Pearce's hatred swelled.

In the last few moments before they left, Pearce felt closer than ever to the old man. His appearance, bedraggled and out of joint, somehow suggested the meanderings of this soul, desultory and empty. Pearce was touched. Child of these wanderings, Pearce knew that his own spirit had as a result grown soft and colorless. Pierre, he saw, was rightfully the heir apparent to his father's house; yet how difficult it was to believe that the same loins had also quickened the tidy intricacies and stiff systems of Pierre! Were both sons forever condemned, he questioned himself now, both forever unredeemable?

Before they left, Pierre's father and mother said goodbye in a kindly fashion and asked them, when Pierre was out of earshot, to take care of him and see to it that he rode slowly.

On the way there, however, Pierre set the pace, and it was fast. In the car, Pearce, whose fever seemed to have vanished completely, tried to account for Sydney's disappearance. It was obvious that Pierre must by now have revealed the secret to her. But where was she? At all events, he was sure that Pierre was clever enough to have managed this last bit of juggling. He knew that he would soon be in a position to solve the matter, and for the moment he was content to dismiss it from his mind. He drove on, thinking of the cliffs ahead and gazing continuously at Ann, gladdened by her loved presence. He shared his attention between the road and her, taking even the difficult curves with one corner of his vision fixed upon her. Her small body set firmly against his side was a new life, created out of his rib, and he offered her now his love as she offered him hers, hammered, burnished, purified.

When they arrived at last at the cliffs, Pierre drove his motorcycle right out to the edge, skirting along it for several hundred feet and parking only a few feet from the drop. Pearce had to stop the car considerably farther back. He took Ann's hand and they ran out to meet Pierre. The shore was utterly desolate, neither tree nor person relieved the rocky prospect. The three of them gazed over the edge. Stretching out into the water ran a vast peninsula of broken rocks, and in huge separated mounds, isles of broken rock thrust up out of the sea. The ocean itself slapped these alien obstructions with its roaring, scattered

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arms, tearing its giant fingers to shreds. Directly before them, the cliff swung away in a smooth arc for a mile, cupped like a moon-crater around the bay that beat inaccessibly below them. The smooth rock at their feet fell hundreds of yards to the churning, rock-filled basin. Pearce turned to Ann and saw how strongly this jagged world had satisfied her inmost, chambered heart and set her tremulous face at peace. The wind blew eagerly, full of the salt spray.

A few moments later, they pushed Pierre over the edge. It was remarkable how much resistance he offered despite his feeble muscles. Pearce had almost begun to doubt Pierre's substantiality, but he now saw his mistake. She pushed him first, and he turned, startled beyond belief. Pearce seized him at once and the two of them, against his straining muscles—which, in his upper legs and in the small of his back, may have been somewhat more developed than the rest—toppled his bulky figure into the deep air in an overwhelming alteration of his poise. They threw the motorcycle in after him. The ground was rock, and the wheels left no trace as it was rolled to the drop. As they stood there, looking over the edge for the now invisible traces of their crime, they seemed to be celebrants in a sacrificial rite in which the sacrifice had been torn from their own breasts and delivered up to the hungry ranting world.

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STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

# L'Après-Midi d'un Faune. Églogue

*Le Faune:*

Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer.
Si clair,
Leur incarnat léger, qu'il voltige dans l'air
Assoupi de sommeils touffus.
Aimai-je un rêve?
Mon doute, amas de nuit ancienne, s'achève
En maint rameau subtil, qui, demeuré les vrais
Bois mêmes, prouve, hélas! que bien seul je m'offrais
Pour triomphe la faute idéale de roses.
Réfléchissons . . .
ou si les femmes dont tu gloses
Figurent un souhait de tes sens fabuleux!
Faune, l'illusion s'échappe des yeux bleus
Et froids, comme une source en pleurs, de la plus chaste:
Mais, l'autre tout soupirs, dis-tu qu'elle contraste
Comme brise du jour chaude dans ta toison!
Que non! par l'immobile et lasse pâmoison
Suffoquant de chaleurs le matin frais s'il lutte,
Ne murmure point d'eau que ne verse ma flûte
Au bosquet arrosé d'accords; et le seul vent
Hors des deux tuyaux prompt à s'exhaler avant
Qu'il disperse le son dans une pluie aride,
C'est, à l'horizon pas remué d'une ride,
Le visible et serein souffle artificiel
De l'inspiration, qui regagne le ciel.

O bords siciliens d'un calme marécage
Qu'à l'envi des soleils ma vanité saccage,
Tacite sous les fleurs d'étincelles, CONTEZ
"*Que je coupais ici les creux roseaux domptés*
*Par le talent; quand, sur l'or glauque de lointaines*

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*Verdures dédiant leur vigne à des fontaines,*
*Ondoie une blancheur animale au repos:*
*Et qu'au prélude lent où naissent les pipeaux,*
*Ce vol de cygnes, non! de naïades se sauve*
*Ou plonge . . .*"

Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve
Sans marquer par quel art ensemble détala
Trop d'hymen souhaité de qui cherche le *la*:
Alors m'éveillerai-je à la ferveur première,
Droit et seul, sous un flot antique de lumière,
Lys! et l'un de vous tous pour l'ingénuité.

Autre que ce doux rien par leur lèvre ébruité,
Le baiser, qui tout bas des perfides assure,
Mon sein, vierge de preuve, atteste une morsure
Mystérieuse, due à quelque auguste dent;
Mais, bast! arcane tel élut pour confident
Le jonc vaste et jumeau dont sous l'azur on joue:
Qui, détournant à soi le trouble de la joue
Rêve, dans un solo long, que nous amusions
La beauté d'alentour par des confusions
Fausses entre elle-même et notre chant crédule;
Et de faire aussi haut que l'amour se module
Évanouir du songe ordinaire de dos
Ou de flanc pur suivis avec mes regards clos,
Une sonore, vaine et monotone ligne.

Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne
Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends!
Moi, de ma rumeur fier, je vais parler longtemps
Des déesses; et par d'idolâtres peintures,
A leur ombre enlever encore des ceintures:
Ainsi, quand des raisins j'ai sucé la clarté,
Pour bannir un regret par ma feinte écarté,
Rieur, j'élève au ciel d'été la grappe vide
Et, soufflant dans ses peaux lumineuses, avide
D'ivresse, jusqu'au soir je regarde au travers.

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O nymphes, regonflons des SOUVENIRS divers.
"*Mon œil, trouant les joncs, dardait chaque encolure*
*Immortelle, qui noie en l'onde sa brûlure*
*Avec un cri de rage au ciel de la forêt;*
*Et le splendide bain de cheveux disparaît*
*Dans les clartés et les frissons, ô pierreries!*
*J'accours; quand, à mes pieds, s'entrejoignent (meurtries*
*De la langueur goûtée à ce mal d'être deux)*
*Des dormeuses parmi leurs seuls bras hasardeux;*
*Je les ravis, sans les désenlacer, et vole*
*A ce massif, haï par l'ombrage frivole,*
*De roses tarissant tout parfum au soleil,*
*Où notre ébat au jour consumé soit pareil.*"
Je t'adore, courroux des vierges, ô délice
Farouche du sacré fardeau nu qui se glisse
Pour fuir ma lèvre en feu buvant, comme un éclair
Tressaille! la frayeur secrète de la chair:
Des pieds de l'inhumaine au cœur de la timide
Que délaisse à la fois une innocence, humide
De larmes folles ou de moins tristes vapeurs.
"*Mon crime, c'est d'avoir, gai de vaincre ces peurs*
*Traîtresses, divisé la touffe échevelée*
*De baisers que les dieux gardaient si bien mêlée;*
*Car, à peine j'allais cacher un rire ardent*
*Sous les replis heureux d'une seule (gardant*
*Par un doigt simple, afin que sa candeur de plume*
*Se teignît à l'émoi de sa sœur qui s'allume,*
*La petite, naïve et ne rougissant pas:)*
*Que de mes bras, défaits par de vagues trépas,*
*Cette proie, à jamais ingrate se délivre*
*Sans pitié du sanglot dont j'étais encore ivre.*"

Tant pis! vers le bonheur d'autres m'entraîneront
Par leur tresse nouée aux cornes de mon front:
Tu sais, ma passion, que, pourpre et déjà mûre,
Chaque grenade éclate et d'abeilles murmure;
Et notre sang, épris de qui le va saisir,
Coule pour tout l'essaim éternel du désir.
A l'heure où ce bois d'or et de cendres se teinte

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Une fête s'exalte en la feuillée éteinte:
Etna! c'est parmi toi visité de Vénus
Sur ta lave posant ses talons ingénus,
Quand tonne un somme triste ou s'épuise la flamme.
Je tiens la reine!

O sûr châtiment . . .

Non, mais l'âme
De paroles vacante et ce corps alourdi
Tard succombent au fier silence de midi:
Sans plus il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème,
Sur le sable altéré gisant et comme j'aime
Ouvrir ma bouche à l'astre efficace des vins!

Couple, adieu; je vais voir l'ombre que tu devins.

*translated by*
FREDERICK MORGAN

## The Afternoon of a Faun. Eclogue

*The Faun:*

These nymphs, I would make them endure.

Their delicate flesh-tint so clear,
it hovers yet upon the air
heavy with foliage of sleep.

Was it a dream I loved? My doubt,
hoarded of old night, culminates
in many a subtle branch, that stayed
the very forest's self and proves
alas! that I alone proposed
the ideal failing of the rose
as triumph of my own. Think now . . .

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and if the women whom you gloze
picture a wish of your fabled senses!
Faun, the illusion takes escape
from blue cold eyes, like a spring in tears,
of the purer one: and would you say
of her, the other, made of sighs,
that she contrasts, like the day breeze
warmly astir now in your fleece!
No! through the moveless, half-alive
languor that suffocates in heat
freshness of morning, if it strive,
no water sounds save what is poured
upon the grove sparged with accords
by this my flute; and the sole wind
prompt from twin pipes to be exhaled
before dispersal of the sound
in arid shower without rain
is—on the unwrinkled, unstirred
horizon—calm and clear to the eye,
the artificial breath of in-
spiration, which regains the sky.

Sicilian shores of a calm marsh,
despoilèd by my vanity
that vies with suns, tacit beneath
the flower-sparkle, now RELATE
*how here I cut the hollow reeds*
*that talent tames; when, on pale gold*
*of distant greens that dedicate*
*their vine to fountains, undulates*
*an animal whiteness in repose:*
*and how at sound of slow prelude*
*with which the pipes first come to life*
*this flight of swans, no! naiads flees*
*or plunges . . .*

Limp in the tawny hour
all is burning and shows no trace
by what art those too many brides
longed-for by him who seeks the *A*

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all at once decamped; then shall I wake
to the primal fire, alone and straight,
beneath an ancient surge of light,
and one of all of you, lilies!
by strength of my simplicity.

Other than the soft nothingness
their lips made rumor of, the kiss,
which gives assurance in low tones
of the two perfidious ones,
my breast, immaculate of proof,
attests an enigmatic bite,
imputed to some august tooth;
leave it! such mystery made choice
of confidant: the vast twinned reed—
beneath blue sky we give it voice:
diverting to itself the cheek's
turmoil, it dreams, in a long solo,
that we amused the beauty here-
about by false bewilderments
between it and our naive song;
dreams too that from the usual dream
of back or flawless flank traced by
my shuttered glances, it makes fade,
tempered to love's own pitch, a vain,
monotonous, sonorous line.

Oh instrument of flights, try then,
cunning Syrinx, to bloom again
by lakes where you await me! I,
proud of my murmur, shall discourse
at length of goddesses; and by
idolatries warmly portrayed
remove more cinctures from their shades:
thus, when from grapes their clarity
I suck, to banish a regret
deflected by my strategy,
laughing, I raise the cluster high
and empty to the summer sky,
and breathing into its bright skins,

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craving the grace of drunkenness,
I gaze them through till night begins.

Oh nymphs, let us once more expand
various MEMORIES. *My eye,*
*piercing the reeds, darted at each*
*immortal neck-and-shoulders, which*
*submerged its burning in the wave*
*with a cry of rage to the forest sky;*
*and the splendid shower of their hair*
*in shimmering limpidities,*
*oh jewels, vanishes! I run;*
*when, at my feet, all interlaced*
*(bruised by the languor which they taste*
*of this sickness of being two),*
*I come upon them where they sleep*
*amid their own chance arms alone;*
*and seizing them, together still*
*entwined, I fly to this massed bloom—*
*detested by the frivolous shade—*
*of roses draining all perfume*
*in the sun's heat; where our frisk play*
*may mirror the consumèd day.*
I worship you, oh wrath of virgins,
savage joy of the sacred burden
sliding its nakedness to flee
my lips that drink, all fiery,—
like tremor of a lightning-flash!—
the secret terror of the flesh:
from feet of the inhuman one
to her shy sister's heart, who is
forsaken at the instant by
an innocence, moist with wild tears
or humors of a brighter cheer.
*My crime is, that in gaiety*
*of vanquishing these traitor fears*
*I parted the disheveled tuft*
*of kisses which the gods had kept*
*so closely mingled; for I scarce*
*moved to conceal a burning laugh*
***beneath glad sinuosities***

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*of one alone (holding the child,*
*naive and never blushing, by*
*a single finger, that her white-*
*swan candor might take tinge of shame*
*from kindling of her sister's flame:)*
*when from my arms, that are undone*
*by obscure passings, this my prey*
*for ever thankless slips away*
*unpitying the sob which still*
*intoxicated me.*

Ah well!
Others will draw me towards joy,
their tresses knotted to my brow's
twin horns: you know, my passion, how
each pomegranate, purple now
and fully ripened, bursts— and hums
with bees; and our blood, taking fire
from her who will possess it, flows
for the timeless swarm of all desire.
At the hour when this wood is tinged
with ash and gold, a festival
flares up in the extinguished leaves:
Etna! 'tis on your slopes, visited
by Venus setting down her heels
artless upon your lava, when
a solemn slumber thunders, or
the flame expires. I hold the queen!

Oh certain punishment . . .

But no,
the spirit empty of words, and
this weighed-down body late succumb
to the proud silence of mid-day;
no more—lying on the parched sand,
forgetful of the blasphemy,
I must sleep, in my chosen way,
wide-mouthed to the wine-fostering sun!

Couple, farewell; I soon shall see
the shade wherein you merged as one.

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HUGH KENNER

# The Revenge of the Void

THE CAREER OF WYNDHAM LEWIS—as significant an assault upon the *néant* as that of Swift—entered a new phase in the mid-1930's with what may be described as a Kantian act of belief in the existence of other people. Up to then he had dangled puppets on electric wires down which coursed to them in lurid blue pulses his own verbal energy. He displayed, like a character in one of his early stories, "a great empirical expertness in reality, without being altogether at home in it". The dialogue in *Tarr* (1918) or *The Childermass* (1928) is Wyndham Lewis; *The Revenge for Love* (1937)[1] might be taken at first sight for a relapse; its dialogue seems largely from the neighborhood cinema:

> "Promise me, Victor, not to worry."
> "Of course I shan't, Margot," he droned up roughly at her.
> "You won't will you?"
> "Of course. I'm just tired." He stretched out and closed his eyes.
> "Sleep it off then. That's the best. Bye-bye darling!" She kissed him.
> A minute, and he heard the gentle bang of the front door.

I pull this out of context to show how banal it is. But it isn't likely to strike a reader of the novel as banal; it is simply right. Margot and Victor inhabit squalor with a kind of unbeaten resignation. Victor is a second rate painter and knows it; he smiles "a Clark Gable smile" at his resilient worshipful schoolgirl of a wife, whose emotions would be those of a girl eating chocolates at the cinema if they were turned inward instead of being fixed leech-like on Victor. These unpromising dummies aren't dead spots in the book's tissue, they are part of it. Their imperfect reality rhymes perfectly with the other components of a novel about the unreal, in which there is only one other character possessing any human reality at all. By the logic of Lewis' antecedent career, *The Revenge for Love,* sacrificing the normal local energy of his prose in an attempt to key the writing down

[1]Suppressed in the United States at time of publication and finally published in 1952 by Henry Regnery.

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to real people whom he doesn't really grasp as people, should have been a dismal bore. By some unforeseeable miracle of equilibrium it is instead a great novel. It is the almost perfect articulation of a vision, poised and paradoxically *quiet*, though the vision is what Lewis has elsewhere called "the black material of social truth": Nietzsche's and Machiavelli's vision of the world as a void informed by mere power.

Ten years earlier Lewis wrote this speech for the Bailiff in *The Childermass:*

> What is brewing here is a dust-storm you understand or an event of no more importance—this is a very arid place, I try to make it a little juicy as you have often observed with displeasure, it is The Plain of Death and is full of an empty whirling underneath—its movements signify nothing: these myrmidons will whirl about and my particles there will agitate and collide, vortex within vortex, mine and thine, with a buzzing of meum and tuum, a fine angry senseless music, it will be an unintelligible beating of the air if we go on just as it will be if we do not.

This epitomizes the use to which, by and large, Lewis has put one of the most impressive talents in all literature. *The Revenge for Love* is saved by the forces which inhibited his usual impulse to "make it a little juicy". It is saved, specifically, by Margot Stamp's abashment of her creator's satiric energy. Hanging on the border of non-entity, Margot remains precariously real. Her reality, indeed, is the key to the meaning of the book, and the Lewis prose, addressed for the first time to the presentation of such a figure, respects her eggshell autonomy and that of her husband. The reined prose isn't inert, however; it moves, scattering images with simulated casualness, through the clutter of Margot's awakening sensibility:

> As Margot ceased to move, the cymballing of the dilapidated box-mattress came to a stop. Stealthily she adjusted herself upon the ruins of their thirty-shilling love-nest (second-hand, in the Bell Street market), in an awkward squatting position—so as not to anger any further the stupid springs. So she remained for a while, unwilling on her side to make the next move. That should have come from Victor. The springs had spoken—it was for him to salute the day. But Victor played possum, in a sly sham-stupor, cut off from the crass daylight by a husky shoulder. He was having no truck with *this* day!

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The tension between the commonplace actions and the unusual modes of expression—asides and epithetic excursions assembled in gimcrack syntax—is what establishes Margot's genuineness for us, throughout the many pages during which her consciousness is the centre of attention. Her love for Victor has no sham-Shakespearean trappings; it is pathetic and tenacious, with the random inexplicability that characterizes human attachments. We are not asked to believe that eternity is in her lips and eyes, nor that love is stronger than Time, nor on the other hand that her passion is a Lilliputian aberration to be described with mock-eighteenth-century coolness. Her willingness to undergo slow destruction at Victor's side is the sole postulate on which subsequent events are hinged.

> The notion of death always—in spite of the fact that she saw how it was quite impracticable for her—brought rest to her mind. For when she had first considered it—before she had realized the catch, from love's standpoint—it had deeply impressed her with its beautiful Journey's End effect. It was *The Heart of the Sunset*—as the girl had written who had killed herself up among the skyscrapers of New York.

The touch of Gerty MacDowell in this is counterpoised by the fact that Margot doesn't dwell on the rhetoric of hurling herself from the eightieth story. The clichés of the penny press sooth her without kinetic allure. Though there seems no reason why she should not think of death, she stubbornly undergoes her life of protracted devotion.

In manuscript the book was called *False Bottoms*. Margot and Victor are drawn innocently into the vortex of the Bloomsbury Communist set. At a party at Sean O'Hara's,

> . . . she could not reach out, to express her misgivings, into the difficult realms of speech, where all these disparities of thinking and acting would fall into place and be plausibly explained: but she was conscious nevertheless of a prodigious *non-sequitur*, at the centre of everything that she saw going on around her—of an immense *false-bottom* underlying every seemingly solid surface, upon which it was her lot to tread.

The focus of the cocktail party is Percy Hardcaster, an agitator who has uselessly and unglamorously lost a leg in a prison break in Spain. For the benefit of the salon-Reds Percy transforms himself into a piece of atrocity propaganda:

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> A red patriarch, Percy Hardcaster reclined, propped by a plethora of red cushions, upon a wide reddish settee, in Red invalid magnificence. . . . Of course all the men thought constantly how exceedingly unpleasant it would be to have a wooden leg. It made their own legs feel quite uncomfortable to look at it—and they couldn't help looking at it, Percy saw to that! . . . But one and all in their hearts determined that it was more necessary than ever to see to it that they should remain the *brains* of the Revolution.

These "fish and fowl and more or less good red herrings"—including "three sturdy 'independents' ('friends of Soviet Russia') from the headquarters of the Book Racket"—aren't of course the brains of anything. They are mere butts for the class-war manoeuvres of Percy the thorough professional. Percy conceives himself to be a competent operator ("We have to be workmanlike and do our stuff in a workmanlike way. . . . I was speaking to you as a technician speaks") who is delivered by his craftsman's detachment into independence from the bourgeois need for a "little bit of sentiment". Part of his job, of course, is to foster those sentiments, and elicit the stock responses ("How perfectly beastly! It's like hearing about the Inquisition, isn't it?") that will be of use to the Party. Embarricaded in his arsenal of techniques, he imagines himself to be the one emancipated individual in the world of dupes.

The real boss, however, is Abershaw, who makes money out of, among other things, gun sales. Abershaw isn't holed up in an office. He is a bland, droll clubman, with the impresario's tact, capable of "rising and walking over to the mantelpiece, against which he leaned in an eighteenth-century pose—there is nothing like a mantelpiece for emphasizing the possession of the *bel air*, and Abershaw was fond of mantelpieces." In Victor Stamp, the craftsman of minimal talents whose residual integrity has debarred him from the facile successes of the art-world, Abershaw sees a trained "hand", powerless because starving, and offers him a job ("You could start on Monday") forging Van Goghs for sale to moneyed gulls.

> "Thanks, old man. I prefer to go on the dole," said Victor.
>
> "Love on the dole!" Abershaw embalmed in a guttural chuckle the title of the play, and rolled his eyes merrily at Margot, who responded with a sickly smiling to his pleasantry. There was no question but

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> what the underworld of the half-real was getting out-of-hand. The creatures who had crept out of that False-Bottom beneath all things were taking an interest in Victor. They were commencing to sniff round her precarious nest. . . . Help him to work honestly they *would* not. That was a fixed principle of theirs. But they would give him a leg-up on the ladder of *fraud,* with the greatest pleasure. . . . A genius like Victor was not allowed to make an honest living. They hated his honesty. . . .

Victor, who knows he is no genius, throws in his lot briefly with the power-game ("might as well be doing that as anything else"), rebels, and is marked out by Abershaw for destruction. Abershaw has no objection to duping Percy Hardcaster as well. He goes through the motions of putting Percy in charge of a gun-running scheme, with Victor to drive the false-bottomed bootleg bus over the border. It has been arranged, of course, that Victor shall be caught; his function is merely to divert official eyes from the real *coup* some miles away.

He and Margot are not caught, however. Having killed a Civil Guard before they discover that their vehicle, allegedly crammed with machine-guns, secretes nothing but bricks, they strike out on foot for the hills, and encountering in a Pyrenees storm the epitome of false bottoms, drop to death over a precipice. A planted forged letter in the pocket of Victor's corpse restores Hardcaster to a Spanish jail, where he melodramatically eschews bitterness.

> Yes, in his way, and all allowance made for the backsliding of the spirit, he was glad to be in prison! Was it not in the last analysis his proper place? It was what the trench was for the Tommy.

This isn't a sense of guilt but a sense of *métier;* Percy is surrounded by his illusion of professionalism to the last. There is now one chink in the illusion, however; the circle doesn't quite close. He is troubled by memories of Margot, whose "strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed by the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating voice. . . ."

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This voice undercuts Percy's autonomy; the one thing recalcitrantly real in the universe of the book remains Margot's love, tinselled though it is with delusions concerning the plane of Victor's worthiness. She never gave up faith in his "genius".

## II

Lewis has always specialized in unreality. His people—Tarr, Kreisler, the Bailiff, Horace Zagreus, Snooty Baronet—have "explained" the universe in some way or other and behave accordingly, until their behaviour (the translation of theory into action) betrays them by dropping them over the precipice that surrounds every theory. They are suspended (like all men, their creator would say) over a void, and are radically unaware of the existence of any things or persons except themselves. Things acquire a kind of realness only when the mind has worked them over. Without, life presents phenomena, to be ordered by analysis, and from the theoretical activity judgments and significant behavior flow. Within, the hidden self ferments with the bitter chemistry of the will. Tom, Dick and Harry project willed worlds from the *self;* they inhabit a universe compliant to their appetites (hence, in *The Revenge for Love,* the satyr Jack, tax-accountant, skirt-chaser, and "good fellow"). The élite involve analytic machinery with the *not self.* They too will their worlds, but their willed worlds have at best the intricate articulation of a Lewis drawing,[2] sheer energetic fiats of wedges, planes and lights from which emerge transmuted fragments of observed forms. Some of the élite have been statesmen, some artists. And they are the people whose personalities are of interest.

The projection of a willed world controlled by analytic machinery gives us the descriptive formula for the details of Lewis' most characteristic prose. Its syntax is synthetic, seldom "natural"; it serves to splice phrases together. Nor do the phrases arise "naturally" from the subject: they must ascribe their origin to the vigorous intervention of the writer's will. The artist doesn't see and record, he registers phenomena and reconstitutes them with images. The cat in *The Apes of God* "like a beadle goose-

[2]It is probably still necessary to assert that Wyndham Lewis the painter is one of the great pictorial innovators.

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stepped with eerie convulsions out of the night cast by a cluster of statuary." The ass in *The Childermass* "pumps an ear-splitting complaint into its downy snout, scouring the loud sound up and down in an insane see-saw." The early Lewis is a brilliant and fascinating epitome of Locke's dream and Nietzsche's complementary doctrine. The world is dead, or at least inaccessible, and we are locked up inside our own skulls; so out of profound irritation with the random triviality of the given, the creative intelligence —such is its nature—forges for itself new environments. "The haphazard manner in which everything struggles and drifts into existence filled me with impatience", he wrote in 1949, not really repentently, of himself in 1919. "I would have had a city born by fiat, as if out of the brain of a god, or someone with god-like power." "Reality," he wrote in 1914, "is in the artist; the image only, and not the reality, is to be found in life." In 1917 he enjoined the man of genius, "Yourself must be your caste."

Instead of, Rubens-like, "borrowing the colour of Life's crude blood, tracing the sprawling and surging of its animal hulks", the artist desiderated by Lewis would recognize that human reality lies far below blood and hulks. But he would recognize that human realities are inaccessible to him, that only appearances can be touched. His interest in human beings would be focussed on their personalities, but he would recognize the essential *unreality* of the "personality" accessible to inspection. It is a screen manoeuvred in front of the unspeakable, or in front of a void. In an important essay of 1917 Lewis wrote,

> The chemistry of personality (subterranean in a sort of cemetery, whose decompositions are our lives) puffs up in frigid balls, soapy Snowmen, arctic carnival-masks, which we can photograph and fix.
>
> Upwards from the surface of existence a lurid and dramatic scum oozes and accumulates into the characters we see. The real and tenacious poisons, the sharp forces of vitality, do not socially transpire. . . . Capriciously, however, the froth-forms of these darkly-contrived machines twist and puff in the air, in our legitimate and liveried masquerade.

If this social world, the artist's material, is unreal, it remains significant. What it signifies is the degree of tension within. "You may blow away a man-of-bubbles with a burgundian gust of laughter, but that is not a personality, it is an apparition of no

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importance. But so much correspondence has it with its original that, if the cadaveric travail beneath it is vigorous and bitter, the dummy or mask will be of a more original grotesqueness." There are duller lives, however, for whom this chemical imagery of ferment and travail would imply too much: ". . . a certain category of spirit that is not quite inanimate and yet not very funny. It consists of those who take, at the Clarkson's[3] situated at the opening of our lives, some conventional Pierrot costume. This is intended to assure them a minimum of strain, of course, and so is a capitulation. In order to evade life we must have recourse to these uniforms, but such a choice leaves nothing but the white and ethereal abstraction of the shadow of laughter."

Lewis' fiction, then, leaving aside his other sorts of verbal activity, concerns itself with the unreal, with gradations of unreality (chemical manifestations vs. ready-made costumes), with groups of people engaged in explicating by their actions some theorem in the Metaphysic of the Void. Naturally a good deal of it—not the best part—can be classified as satire. One may distinguish (a) anatomies of some phony world: the Bloomsbury of *The Apes of God,* the playground of romantic action in *Snooty Baronet;* (b) the *Wild Body* stories, which are concerned with primitive societies, Breton and Spanish, from which the writer extracts some mechanism of personality so emphatic it passes for "character" and so complex in its rhythmic scheme that it gears at every point with the social mechanisms around it and passes for "life"; (c) the purely abstract fantasies—*The Enemy of the Stars* and *The Childermass*—in which a universe of words and images seeks by its extreme local brilliance to afford an aesthetic substitute for any "given" world; and (d) three "novels" of a more traditional sort: *Tarr, The Revenge for Love, The Vulgar Streak.* These books deal with the predicaments of real people betrayed by their own nothingness. *Tarr* suffers from confused intentions: Lewis has lately come to realize that its real theme is the elaborate suicide of the romantic German Kreisler, and that Tarr himself is an intrusion. *The Revenge for Love* and *The Vulgar Streak,* more especially the former, are classics of our time. *The Revenge for Love* is a great novel. It is not only, despite flaws any school-

[3]Clarkson's: London theatrical costumer's.

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master could indicate, a great piece of writing, it has a genuine plot: not a mere sequence of motions through which characters are pushed while the essential points are made in rhetorical asides, nor yet one of the standard bourgeois fables reclothed Maugham-wise, but an action the conception of which was as much an act of genius as any concatenation of epithets in the book, an action of tragic scope and simplicity that suffices to absorb and display the energies of the characters, and without irrelevant voltage illuminates their world.

## III

The theme of the book goes back to *Cantelman's Spring-Mate*, the best of Lewis's early stories,[4] which Joyce and Pound admired and on account of which, it is now difficult to believe, an issue of *The Little Review* was banned from the mails three years before the more notorious *affaire Bloom*. *Cantelman's Spring-Mate* might well have been titled *The Revenge for Love*. Cantelman is a soldier on leave who regards his brother-officers with "steady gnawing anger at such concentration of furious foolishness." He shares their uniform but not their fatuous veneration for their own status as officers and gentlemen. Out of disgust with the human ("the newspapers were the things that stank most on earth, and human beings anywhere were the most ugly and offensive of the brutes because of the confusion caused by their consciousness") he decides to retreat to "the madness of natural things" and take a casual spring mate; the creatures of nature in spring are busily copulating, and neither copulation nor death is for the bird or the insect anything but a mechanically violent matter of course.

> In the narrow road where they got away from the village, Cantelman put his arm around Stella's waist and immediately experienced all the sensations that he had been divining in the creatures around him; the horse, the bird, and the pig. The way in which Stella's hips stood out, the solid blood-heated expanse on which his hand lay, had the amplitude and flatness of a mare. Her lips had at once no practical significance, but only the aesthetic embellishment of a bull-like flower.

[4]Reprinted in the recently published *Little Review Anthology*. Hermitage House. $3.95.

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He immediately discerns that Nature has trapped his anti-romanticism in romance, that his appetites instead of revenging him on the merely human have engaged him with death. Stella is, like all women, he reflects, "contaminated with Nature's hostile power." "With a treachery worthy of a Hun, Nature tempted him towards her. He was drugged with delicious appetites. Very well! he would hoist the unseen power with his own petard. He would throw back Stella where she was discharged from, (if it were allowable, now, to change her into a bomb) first having relieved himself of this humiliating gnawing and yearning in his blood." So on their third meeting, when she enfolds him "with long arms, full of the contradictory and offending fire of spring", Cantelman to the ceaseless tune of a nightingale turns to "the devouring of his mate." "He felt that he was raiding the bowels of Nature, not fecundating the Aspasias of our flimsy flesh, or assuaging, or competing with, the nightingale." He remains convinced that his gesture of contemptuous possession has outwitted Nature, in the trenches reads gravely through her frequent letters about an expected child without comment, and fails to perceive that the animal world, in so perpetuating itself, has in fact made use of him.

The theme of this story, that one's willed assessment of the emotional texture of things does not in fact liberate one from their logic, is crucial in Lewis' best fiction. That at least is what Lewis would want the commentator to say. In point of fact, a certain critical charity is involved in calling it the theme of *Cantelman*. One needs to read very closely and sympathetically to see that though Cantelman twice creates his own poetic world, each time under the impression that he is seeing things as they are, he is all the time unawares playing an insignificant part in a real world inaccessible to human notation. A less finicky reading reveals Lewis' prime energy flowing into Illusion No. 1, Cantelman's "tough" identification of himself with the amatory processes of nature, and an imperfect contrast between this and Illusion No. 2, Cantelman's "undeceived" perception that "the miraculous camouflage of Nature" harbors "everywhere gun-pits and nests of death". The final sentences, where schematically the screw should turn, sound tacked on: "And when he beat a German's brains out, it was with the same impartial malignity that he had

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displayed in the English night with his spring-mate. Only he considered there, too, that he was in some way outwitting Nature; he had no adequate realization of the extent to which, evidently, the death of a Hun was to the advantage of the animal world."

From the beginning in fact, Lewis has been aware that something has been omitted from the analytic activity engaged in by the successive Cantelmans in his fiction; but the things of which they have no adequate realization never, until *The Revenge for Love,* adequately got into the writing. Percy Hardcaster, however, a latter-day Cantelman in his conception of himself as a detached operative, receives comic instead of grimly lyric treatment. When near the beginning of the book he sits awaiting the prison-break, his irritation with the celebrated Spanish night sets his professionalism at a discount: "Glaring through this tenuous opening, he could see the moonlit water, of bronzed milk, in the path of the moon, with an oily shimmer reminiscent of the bottom of a sardine tin; and in his ear was the buzz of a mosquito, which he had just driven off." His glare and the moon's sardine-tin are bathetic complementaries; nature is more than neutral, it is unreasonably offensive. If the pendulum of Percy's sensibility has swung away from romance, it hasn't found the point of impassive rest he would claim. So in the later scene, one of the show-pieces of the book, in which he gives an orthodoxly Pink lady the ruthless low-down on real shooting Communism ("We Communists prefer to see things *as they are, Jill.* We of the working-class . . . are given a raw deal and a *plain* deal. You still feel lost without your little bit of sentiment") and is beaten with electric yet mechanical viciousness by the bull-like Jack for insulting her vanity, the reader who savours the contrast between Percy the professional and the half-real amateur Reds still isn't taken in by the phrase "See things *as they are*". And when Margot's imagined voice in the cell at the end of the book forces on Percy the half-realization that his bleak dispassionate view of life, "seeing it steadily, seeing it whole, and computing his handicap to the millimetre", has left out something essential, it is no eleventh-hour peripeteia for reader and author. Percy is a Wyndham Lewis (in fact "Percy" is Wyndham Lewis's first name), but he is a Wyndham Lewis at whom, for the first time, Lewis can look. The creator of Cantelman and Tarr scrutinized them most imperfectly.

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## IV

The ABC of Lewis's vision is in *Cantelman's Spring-Mate,* but not the ABC of his prose. The prose of *Cantelman* is a thick suave pigment, marvellously sensuous, which might have undergone interesting development if Lewis hadn't decided that the more staccato style of other sketches contemporaneous with *Cantelman* afforded the vision a more appropriate emotional pallette. So he embarked on a twenty-year program—which given the brilliance of the results it is difficult to regret—of elevating his vices into a style. The elements of the unmistakable Wyndham Lewis prose were largely mastered by the time *Tarr* was completed, late in 1914. The technical principle is the fabrication of a world, hardly more than word-deep, by a species of verbal *impasto:* a thick corrugated pigment of words is dashed onto the page. As the pupil of a Van Gogh eye is painted not as a spot but as "a nest of concentric wedges of greens, reds, blues and yellows with their apex inward", so the figure of Anastasya in *Tarr* is an organization of gongs, bubbles, apes, eggs, tobacco, jewelry and hot water:

> When she laughed, this commotion was transmitted to her body as though sharp, sonorous blows had been struck on her mouth. Her lips were long hard bubbles risen in the blond heavy pool of her face, ready to break, pitifully and gaily. Grown forward with ape-like intensity, they refused no emotion noisy egress if it got so far. Her eyes were large, stubborn and reflective, brown coming out of blondness. Her head was like a deep white egg in a tobacco-coloured nest. She exuded personality with alarming and disgusting intensity. It was an ostentation similar to diamonds and gold watch-chains. Kreisler felt himself in the midst of a cascade, a hot cascade.

This is done with nearly Teutonic deliberateness; in later books these highly original mechanisms of presentation are lightened and speeded up. Simultaneously, the subject-matter gives up weight and grows more abstract and trivial. In *Tarr,* though the cogs slip frequently, a considerable mass of reality is being manoeuvred: the lethal romance of Herr Kreisler's ponderous clockwork dive into annihilation is a subject of some substance. By *Snooty Baronnet* (1932) the style has reached its most impressive efflorescence and the matter (a joint parody of D. H. and T. E. Lawrence) a fragmented nullity that doesn't redeem some very lively pages.[5]

[5]"She grappled with me at once, before the words were well out of my mouth, with the

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A brilliant array of techniques for articulating the carapaces of the unreal may be observed in Lewis' middle period in pursuit of a subject to complement its own vitality. *The Apes of God* (1930) was an attempt to assimilate the multiple but as it proved too trivial unrealities of Bloomsbury. *The Childermass* (1928) was an attempt to do without a "real" world altogether and let the vision articulate itself. The 1927 revision of the early *Wild Body* stories compounds disaster. This decade saw the squandering of an unprecedented talent. Two sentences from *The Childermass* sum it up: "It is not people that interest me so much as the principles that determine their actions", and "I like to see a few corpses about, it makes the others seem almost alive."

It belongs to the nature of Lewis' mind and material, of course, that his overwhelming merits lie very close to chaos. The details of his best prose depend on the author's will alone; there are no roads through a vacuum. Similarly, the behavior of his characters depends on their will alone, and the structure of their will depends on the syllogistic intellect. They cannot *see* much, though they can *persuade themselves* of anything. They explain the world, then base a personality and a mode of behaviour on the explanation. Lewis has done this several times himself: the wild man, craftsman, clubman, and prophet of successive polemical books aren't simply masks; each seems temporarily to absorb the whole man, and to spring out of an exhaustive rationale. "*Never,*" he wrote in *The Code of a Herdsman* (1917), "fall into the vulgarity of assuming yourself to be one ego. . . . In order to live you must remain broken up." If you alone are real, you must multiply yourself to obtain the elbow-room of possible worlds.

With *The Revenge for Love,* however, he became engaged for the first time with an adequate theme: the possible worlds of political theory, each enclosing its quota of nothingness and clamped around the head of its devotee like an opaque fishbowl.

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self-conscious gusto of a Chatterley-taught expert. But as I spoke I went to meet her—as I started my mechanical leg giving out an ominous creak (I had omitted to oil it, like watches and clocks these things require lubrication). I seized her stiffly round the body. All of her passably lissom person—on the slight side—gave. It was the human willow, more or less. It fled into the hard argument of my muscular pressures. Her waist broke off and vanished into me as I took her over in waspish segments, an upper and a nether. The bosoms and head settled like a trio of hefty birds upon the upper slope of my militant trunk: a headless nautilus on the other hand settled upon my middle, and attacked my hams with its horrid tentacles—I could feel the monster of the slimy submarine-bottoms grinding away beneath, headless and ravenous."

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Hardcaster has explained the world in terms of professionalism: he is a lower class allotrope of the Public School Englishman, "doing his bit" on the barricades. Abershaw has explained it in terms of power; Gillian Phipps in terms of "communism"; Margot Stamp in terms of Victor. Only Margot is devoted to anything more than an idea.

As for Victor, he is a remarkable creation: a man of stamp dwelling on the borders of nothingness. We first meet him engaged in a gamble with fate; he will paint a passable picture, or put his head in the gas-oven. The picture is passable. "It was worth nothing—from any point of view; for of course no one would give anything for a picture of that sort to-day, unless it had a Name attached to it (and Stamp was not a name) and not much then. But it was amusing it should have turned out that way. It altered nothing—he had wasted two more hours, that was all." When we next see Victor painting, he is sitting in the fake-masterpiece factory, dressed up as Van Gogh, doing a self-portrait (he is not required to forge the signatures, only the pictures). He calls a halt by putting his foot through the canvas. In the end it is a forgery of his own signature—the name of a nobody—that traps him. The metaphysic of names is at least as important an image as the false-bottom for the vision of non-being surrounding the characters.

And the "resistant and finely-sculptured surface of sheer words" of Lewis' earlier ideal gives place to a finer and subtler prose, still inimitable but now conformed to a subject-matter not itself. Margot by the Spanish stream undergoes the same sudden conviction of the implacable neutrality of Nature that had settled on Cantelman in the English spring; "she reserved her right to remain *outside* of nature, now it came to the point; not to participate in its sunny dream."

> Under different circumstances, however, the behaviour of these jolly liquids, the phlegmatic grandeur of these chaotic stones, would have called forth other responses; all would have passed off quite differently had her mind not been obsessed with the actors, for whom these pastoral sets were the incongruous backgrounds, and if she had not been part of this agony of men. It was Victor who was her *nature* now; and "wild nature" too, at that. So the company of nature—all the blatant bustle of these liquids and gasses, and the chilly festivity of the organic bodies

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> attached to them, propelled upon wing, foot, fin—did not recommend itself to her, greatly to her surprise. Though was that to be wondered at, seeing that it jazzed around her breaking heart, so that she was astonished, if not almost scandalized.

One no longer suspects that, as in *Cantelman,* this is Lewis affirming anti-romanticism; it is Margot affirming the human, with its bitter obligation to take action, and rejecting the womb-world of Ruskin and Tennyson. There is nothing sardonic about Lewis' narration of the gesture by which she leaves *Sesame and the Lilies* by the stream-side, as she starts back rapidly to the town to overtake Victor and join him in the enterprise that ends in death.

## V

Since *The Revenge for Love* Lewis has written only two other pieces of fiction—*The Vulgar Streak,* a novel published in 1941, and *Rotting Hill* (1952), a book of sketches and stories of post-war England. *Rotting Hill* contains one excellent story, "Time the Tiger", and some convincing vignettes (notably "The Rot") of Britain-as-poorhouse. It displays Lewis in a waning phase, however. The accent and echo of the famous style are audible in every phrase—no book of Lewis's with the possible exception of the autobiographical *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) is closer to the speaking voice—but the weary briskness of an overtaxed spring has replaced the energy that used to course down the pages bearing with it a-tumble such quantities of heteroclite material. *The Vulgar Streak,* on the other hand, maintains its author's curve of development at the high point marked by the story of Percy Hardcaster. The time is mid-1939, and there are signs that the author meant to link the themes of this smoothly-written book more explicitly with the political events of those months than he in fact did. The mythological simplicity of the plot, however, is sufficient without rubrics to contain the late history of Europe. Vincent Penhale is exhibited in the overture taking his leisure in Venice, the city built on pilings in the Adriatic mud, at a time when less self-confident tourists are checking out of the bleakly de-luxe hotels and hastening to get home before the war starts. He is vaguely reputed to be a luxury-class swell in London—perhaps a decorator or dress-designer—and he is engaged in seduc-

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ing a moneyed girl—he is wealthy enough and confident enough for that. We next discover that he has emerged by sheer willpower from a working-class slum, by refining his accent and manners. The work of Arnold Bennett is concentrated into one wonderful chapter, the Pygmalion-myth so dear to Bernard Shaw into another, as the book articulates Vincent's conviction that only a few gestures and tricks of pronunciation separate class from class. Vincent has simply elected the more luxurious unreality. The denouement comes with the unlucky revelation that he has been supporting his elegance by passing counterfeit money. Governments, it is true, do this all the time; currency, like "class", is what people can be persuaded to accept. (Victor Stamp's passable picture would have been salable with another name signed to it, and the proprietors of the forging-factory rationalize their business by claiming that Van Gogh himself once forged Rembrandts.) But Vincent, up till now the Wyndham Lewis character *par excellence*, comes to an un-Lewisian realization that he has woven the wind and harmed others by it, and hangs himself, leaving nothing behind but a character-reference his butler won't care to show.

*The Vulgar Streak* is almost unobtainable; most of the publisher's stock was bombed in the warehouse. It ought to be reissued, much more than any other out-of-print Lewis book. It is a superb novel, if a melancholy pro-tem finale to the most astonishing literary career of the twentieth century. The man to whose mind the Cartesian split and the Nietzschean energy were not hobbies but life-blood, who having made the centre of his world a vacuum was better equipped than anyone else to write out of inner knowledge the tragedy of his time, who conjured out of nothing with a mind more lively than that of any other novelist a new prose and a new kind of fiction, devoted his most rapid and functional writing to bring the values he discerned in an entire civilization, and (transposed into the prerogatives of genius) largely shared with it, up short at the end of a rope.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This essay reflects a long correspondence with Mr. John Reid, some of whose phrases and observations it preserves.*

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MICHAEL HARARI

## Battle Exhaustion

Kicked into the limelight in the couldn't-care-less
Hill country of childhood we had the big bad wolf on our tails
Right away and ran for our lives
Before those teeth connected.

And the years were like continents, enormous and old
And tricky as a story book, with teachers
On the rampage, rumbling
Parents coming for us like landslides.

And then the forests of our teens kept catching fire—
We panicked, by coward's luck escaped a frying
But look at those dismayed acres
We left behind of reminding grey.

They shunted us into camp: we deserted, tip and run
With the redcaps all the way to the coast, no time
And too piss-poor anyway
For rubbering lips and heads in laps:

Till the cliffs of April defined a twenty-first birthday, set
Like a harbour mouthing a brandy sea, but our drive
Had conked out long ago.
Couldn't even lug our featherweight

Selves aboard, let alone go sailing away
Like Christopher Columbus, spotting ideas like birds, with a
Following wind of enthusiasm
Into the blue and make news.

## Poem

Shadow, genie and master joker,
You without me are abracadabra,
Powerful as useless, an escaped gas:
I without you a tumbledown toper
Of beer-brown boredom in glass-green days.

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Together, like a wing of jets
We'd peel the screaming sun for breakfast,
Loop towns and rivers with life and bridges,
Resound the churches with a crash chorale.
Or on our lonesome, corner of a field,
Rustle to sleep in a drifting tent,
Or a trio in an eiderdown room
Stir the sleepy currents of a warm woman.

## Thanks

Venice was kindest because it corresponded.
The monster rooms we'd visited in ourselves,
The low-ways were snaky, so were ours, the impromptu
Bridges expected.

And we daydreamed like the dawdles in the canal
And here today and gone tomorrow warships
Anchored in us and the slam rain riveted
Mood to piazza.

Plans packed us off: we left ourselves behind,
Praying to our distrust beneath the gold
Domes weird with mosaic as the twelve o'clock cannon
Clouded the pigeons.

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R. D. B. HUDSON

# Obsequies for a Personal Friend

*O! Life on the Grand Phantasma*
*Goes so fast.*

I

Al died today. We shall
To burial, and reverent
Stand about his Garden City plot,
And each with quick guilt greed for
Death's harmonium.
As Al was lowered in copper-plated qualities,
A friend behind a near-by sepulcher
Released a Park Department pigeon.
Cracked was the clay-formed mold of man and away the
Cyclopean soul!
Up Paraclete! Up Holy Dove! There it goes.
(I too would like to be wrapt up to heaven in stolen pigeon wings.)
Alas, its speckled cloth to other eyes
Revealed its illegitimate ascent.
"Speckled colors shall not be allowed:
Assumption shall never be accomplished
On Speculated wings," was chalked on heaven's wall.

II

Disenthralled,
We were with anger now concerned
In the remaining consecration
Of his bone-bound shell.
Eternal earth adore him through.
"Sink in! Sink to the vulgar core!"

III

"Potential Vegetable! New force,
The better meaning,
In yielding Kohlrabi and minerals
Be freely dissolute with growth;
Make seed and aggregate.
These are the Junior beatitudes. Spread yourself

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Incorporate with Chicken waste
Over the Long Island potato fields.
Achieve the presumptuous plan,
And everywhere resolve—
Be happy in supreme adjustment."

IV

And as we parted from Al's grave,
Respondent moment, and quit him
For the slightly warmer death
We shared communally, the Cemetery
Air said "Transit" all around us, and we wept.

REUEL DENNEY

## The Shore September

IS this late fog with its spook cover
The end simple of all summer?
The loomed lighthouse that wans walking,
The fisherman and his bone skiff
Are near enough, yet are nebulous
And the wave sighs as much as if
It might mine now each cliff shore.
The drained, delicate, long feeling
In which glimmers the coastline
Is impalpable pastel, until
That girl child on the beach point
Walks far out, to the tide mark—
The grey floor of loyal contour
Coldly slabbed by a grand music—
As if, there, she meant to measure
The worked wind of past pressure,
The limit shape of a sea's will.
Grain and grain, her noded dune
Is a hill moved and grooved well
Where air makes the grasses follow,
Bringers of special birds, cries
To nest along this sloping land;
And one of the birds is her white hand.

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DONALD HALL

# Wedding Speeches

*Groom:*

The welter world unhinges me; I send
A whirling way my crying toward your face,
But you are distant, and you do not tend
My agonies with your unmeasured grace.
O let us touch and mend
The mazeful tatters of this wedding lace.

*Bride:*

White in the crowd is perfect, and the white
Against the blur of backgrounds is a word
Of pure contentment, and a moveless light
For you who flit as crazy as a bird.
O sink upon my bright
And certain breast, where misery is blurred.

*Groom:*

Now I have told your name, my certain girl,
Against the fruitless winds and I am found,
Secure against the rumour and the swirl,
And fastened like a pillar to the ground.
O let us waltz and whirl
Through ballrooms filled with festivals of sound.

*Bride:*

I am too naked for this dance. I fall
Away from you, your solid arms and face.
I cringe against the white and fainting wall;
My gown is tatters, and not wedding lace.
O let us kneel and call
Hymenaeus to this sacred place.

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JAMES R. FRAKES

# Nocturne

The occasion was this: no moon
And the sky like a thousand gulls
Fixed in a shaky pattern. There had been
No news since sunset, and the rules
Of the game were harsh in angry code:
To love cost more than money or food.

The players knew their speeches:
Henry, blind and somewhat short of breath,
Panted the glories of light. The duchess
Denied everything. Dan spoke truth
Like a strumpet, tattered and fierce.
Nobody listened to the chorus.

And the costumes: velvet dresses,
Periwigs and motley, capes and masks.
And the action: twenty dainty kisses,
Threats, stabbings, and tightwire risks.
Remember now—no moon, and the grass
Wet as a weedy brook. Pity us.

Now ask who won the prize or who bestowed
Ribbons pocky with ancient blood.
Did thunder come to shake the night
And did the sun ever break like a shout?

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IRMA BRANDEIS

# On Reading Dante Whole

BENEDETTO CROCE'S READERS WILL REMEMBER how insistently during the last thirty years of his life the celebrated critic repeated and developed (with vigor ever fresh and unrelenting venom towards opposition) his thesis that the *Divine Comedy* is not an integrated poem, but a "theological romance" spiced with moments of lofty poetry; that its structure, arising from a didactic and practical motivation, has a unity quite extrinsic to the poetry and incapable of telling us anything about it; and that consequently all study of its concepts, its action, its protagonist, is quite irrelevant to the poetic experience.[1]

To this there have of course been quantities of answers, ranging in temperature from warm to boiling. But, ironically, most of Croce's opponents have tended, when they turned from theory to textual criticism, unwillingly and even unwittingly to confirm him. And they have done so especially, it seems to me, in the treatment of the great dramatic encounters of the otherworld (Paolo and Francesca, Pier delle Vigne, Ugolino, etc.), scarcely budging from the traditional way of reading them as though they were, indeed, what Croce calls them: separate and self-sufficient "lyrics"; as though their actors were attached to the regions of suffering or correction merely by the sad results of their sins or the cheerful ones of their enlightenment.

Something, then, yet remains to be proven by those who would have the *Comedy* viewed as one work, and it is this: that such scenes, far from being pauses in or "asides" from the great themes of the poem, stand line for line at the very heart of the matter; that each contains an essential revelation in dramatic form of the nature of some particular moral condition; that each carries forward the work of the whole poem as cogently (if less obviously) as do the revelations by argument, by dream, by sacramental vision. That such a view requires proof will, I hope, be excuse

[1]See B. Croce: *The Poetry of Dante;* Henry Holt, 1922, tr. by D. Ainslee.

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enough for returning once again to the worn subject of Farinata degli Uberti, and reviewing a part of the tenth canto of the *Inferno.*

The reader will recall that Farinata is among the heretics, and that these are placed, in the descending hierarchy of evil, just below the four circles of the incontinent, and above those whose heavier sins of violence and fraud had "injury" as their goal. They have fallen further away from intellectual or divine light than those who lie above, in that they have added deliberation (the gates of Dis) to impulse in their sins. The reader learns from Virgil that it is the Epicureans, "who make the soul die with the body"[2], who lie in the section where Dante has paused to look about him at the burning tombs that encase these sinners. He may, then, take the tombs to signify the voluntary, painful self-burial of the soul that rejects immortality. He is prepared by other encounters with the shades of the dead for Dante's request to see who lies inside the scorching tombs; he is prepared for the poet's swift and penetrating revelation of character, for the historical and human interest of the scene, for the precision and beauty of language and verse. But there is more.

22 "O Tuscan! who through the city of fire goest alive
speaking thus decorously; may it please thee to stop
in this place.
Thy speech clearly shows thee a native of that noble
country which perhaps I vexed too much."
Suddenly this sound issued from one of the chests; where-
at in fear I drew a little closer to my guide.
And he said to me: "Turn thee round; what art thou
doing? lo there Farinata! who has raised himself erect;
from the girdle upwards thou shalt see him all."
Already I had fixed my look on his; and he rose upright
with breast and countenance, as if he entertained great
scorn of Hell;
37 and the bold and ready hands of my Guide pushed me
amongst the sepultures to him, saying: "Let thy words
be numbered."

[2]Inferno, X, 15. All quotations are from the John Carlyle translation (ed. by H. Oelsner), J. M. Dent & Sons, London.

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When I was at the foot of his tomb he looked at me a little; and then, almost contemptuously, he asked me: "Who were thy ancestors?"
I, being desirous to obey, concealed it not; but opened the whole to him: whereupon he raised his brows a little;
46 then he said: "Fiercely adverse were they to me, and to my progenitors, and to my party; so that twice I scattered them."
"If they were driven forth, they returned from every quarter, both times," I answered him; "but yours have not rightly learned that art."
Then, beside him, there rose a shadow visible to the chin; it had raised itself, I think, upon its knees.
It looked around me, as if it had a wish to see whether someone were with me; but when all its expectation was quenched
58 it said, weeping: "If through this blind prison thou goest through height of genius, where is my son and why is he not with thee?"
61 And I to him: "Of myself I come not; he, that waits yonder, leads me through this place; whom perhaps thy Guido held in disdain."
Already his words and the manner of his punishment had read his name to me; hence my answer was so full.
Rising instantly erect, he cried: "How saidst thou? He had? lives he not still? does not the sweet light strike his eyes?"
70 When he perceived that I made some delay in answering, supine he fell again, and showed himself no more.
But that other, magnanimous, at whose desire I had stopped, changed not his aspect, nor moved his neck, nor bent his side.
"And if," continuing his former words, he said, "they have learnt that art badly, it more torments me than this bed.
But the face of the Queen who reigns here, shall not be fifty times rekindled ere thou shalt know the hardness of that art.
82 And so mayest thou once return to the sweet world, tell me why that people is so fierce against my kindred in all its laws?"

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Whereat I to him: "The havoc and the great slaughter
which dyed the Arbia red, causes such oration in
our temple."
And sighing he shook his head; then said: "In that I
was not single; nor without cause, assuredly, should I
have stirred with the others;
but I was single there, where all consented to extirpate
Florence, I alone with open face defended her."
"Ah! so may thy seed sometime have rest," I prayed him,
"solve the knot which has here involved my judgment.
It seems that you see beforehand what time brings with
it, if I rightly hear; and have a different manner with
the present."
"Like one who has imperfect vision, we see the things,"
he said, "which are remote from us; so much light the
Supreme Ruler still gives to us;
when they draw nigh, or are, our intellect is altogether
void; and except what others bring us, we know nothing
of your human state.
Therefore thou mayest understand that all our knowledge
shall be dead, from that moment when the portal of
the future shall be closed."
Then, as compunctious for my fault, I said: "Now will you
therefore tell that fallen one, that his child is still
joined to the living.
And if I was mute before, at the response, let him know
it was because my thoughts already were in that error
which you have resolved for me."
And now my Master was recalling me. . . .

It is almost a standard article of Dante criticism that this scene shows us a noble patriot who, though still inclined to political partisanship, rises strongly above the pain of Hell to talk of his fatherland and father-city with the child of his enemies; and that it sets him in relief against the pathetic Cavalcanti, whose wounded paternal love cuts him off early from the encounter.[3] This approach (matched by the standard treatment of other

[3]See, for example, Erich Auerbach's version in *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1952, especially pp. 229, 30; and the Italian commentary of Attilio Momigliano in his 1950 edition of the *Comedy*.

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scenes in the *Comedy*), assumes in Dante, the author[4], a romantic preoccupation with individual character and emotion—a romantic and wholly alien yearning to exonerate the strayed sheep. If in every other sort of detail, however, Dante is concentrated, consequential, integrated in his poetic rendering of the vision of Hell, and absolutely austere and unmitigating in his penetration of the nature and results of the several moral flaws, it would be strange to find him yielding here. Deviation into pity—and even more, into admiration for resistance to the pains of Hell—should be totally foreign to such a mind. One would expect in Dante's book not only absence of such extraneous expressions of personal concern *on the author's part,* but in all sections of the work a continuous bearing out of the themes, major and minor.

Then what on earth, one may inquire, has a discussion of the Florentine Guelph-Ghibelline rivalry got to do with major themes or with the sin, itself, of heresy? And how does a father's devotion to his son connect with that sin, or with political rivalry?

The question begins to find an answer as soon as one stops assuming in Dante an orthodoxy of definition to which he never shows claim. Over and over again in the *Inferno* Dante enlarges and redefines the narrow categories of sin which he has extracted from one or another revered tradition. This he does occasionally in a phrase which the dramatic action later develops (as when in Canto V he speaks of the carnal sinners as those "who subject reason to lust"), but far more often through the dramatic action, the imagery, the diction, alone. Thus the "scenes" in Hell are the true demonstrations of the nature of error. They *are* "experience" —and as such properly contain the clues to all general ideas. This relationship of experience to knowledge Dante shows us frequently in the questions (followed always by answers) which arise out of the protagonist's participation in certain "scenes". But the other face of the coin—the incommensurability of experience and reason—this he gives us by allowing the dramatic interludes to expound what Virgil cannot attempt to word. And so in Canto X, after the small preparatory shock of learning that the pagan Epicurus is numbered among these heretics, we find in the dramatic encounter a presentation of heresy as not merely

[4]I would stress here the reader's obligation to keep apart in his mind Dante-the-protagonist, sinful and ignorant, and Dante-the-poet, cleansed and educated.

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breach of Christian faith, and not merely breach of that eternal divine love which proceeds from God as well as toward him and embraces all mankind—but as all failure to see and to maintain the essential unity (political and moral) of the earthly city. This failure occurs when the ego clings to some fraction or splinter of the whole, which it itself has nurtured. Epicurus clung to the splinter, mortal body. And Farinata? Farinata is a political partisan; a partisan who, all deeds being past and done, still maintains the spirit of faction and divides the city of man. Whatever else may be implied about his beliefs, he is given in his scene with the pilgrim as a heretic in this sense.

*The dramatic expatiation of this broad view of heresy is bound* closely together by two symbols: blindness or short-sightedness (the arch-complaint of all residents of Hell) and isolation (the tomb), which is a consequence of the first.

We see first Dante and Virgil alone on the "wide plain"; the covers of the tombs are raised but not a soul is in sight, and Dante inquires whether he may not see those whose sighs he hears. Then Farinata rises up almost lovingly at the mere sound of the Tuscan language coming from a speaker invisible to him as he lay within the tomb. (If the tomb is his encasement of spirit, what we see in this response is the positive side of love of country which is able to bring Farinata at least halfway out of his isolation.)

Dante at first sound of Farinata's voice quails, failing to see the speaker and fearing what he cannot see. It is Virgil who turns him round in the right direction, half admonishing him for his mistake in vision and feeling, and then urging him forward. Farinata, on his part, lifts up chest and forehead "as if he entertained great scorn of Hell", waits for Dante to reach his tomb, then asks abruptly and "almost contemptuously" for the names of his forebears. This passage corrects our first impression of the sinner. To scorn Hell when one is in it is to scorn the condition of one's own soul, source of one's anguish—and is perhaps also to scorn the condition of those other souls which have embraced error. The contemptuous question to Dante gives warning of the clan pride (isolation) which is about to emerge in bitterness and anger when Dante's answer shows him to be a Guelph and son of Guelphs. In the reaction to that answer—in the raising of Farinata's brows—we see that the question itself was not directed at making a dis-

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tinction but at asserting a barrier. The difference is an essential one, extremely important to Dante, who gives us a dozen different views of it throughout the *Comedy:* we come upon it in the words written upon the gates of hell, in Justinian's statement of the need for diverse talents and offices in the earthly city, in Sigier's presence in Paradise, in Dante's question to Peter Damian. Farinata's words (lines 46-48) bear out the raising of his brows with the brusque statement of his enmity and his party's triumph over Dante's. And this in turn brings the protagonist full into the bloom of his own capacity for the partisan sin (lines 49-51). His retort crackles.

With lines 52-73 the reader is drawn abruptly into a new phase of the divisive heresy. The shade who rises here from the tomb he shares with Farinata, is the father of Dante's friend and fellow-poet, Guido Cavalcanti. Enough has already been written in praise of the pathos, the economy, the surprise, the contrast of the scene to make its deeper purpose sink quite out of sight. But one does not do Dante justice when one overlooks the co-presence of his superhuman judgment with his human sympathy. Cavalcanti's sin is as much a part of this scene as his fatherly love and grief—or, to put it more accurately, his suffering has its source in his sin. Rising partway from his tomb (one must assume he has heard the voyager name himself to Farinata), he looks not at Dante but all around him, searching for his own boy; and he speaks of the dubious honor of a trip through Hell as though it were a fellowship which the authorities should not have withheld from one young poet if they accorded it to his friend. He asks why his Guido is not there, misunderstands the past tense of Dante's answer in an almost willful way, and flops back into his tomb (*supin ricadde*) in desperation—not waiting for an answer merely because that answer is a little slow in coming.

At this point occurs a crucial and dramatic return to the figure of Farinata (line 73 ff.), who has not budged during the whole of Cavalcanti's appearance, nor removed his attention from Dante's last rankling retort to him. The textual commentaries continue to read in this picture, these verses, the nobility of a soul whose love of country surpasses his suffering of Hell's torment. But such a reading simply ignores Dante's whole demonstration that the pain of Hell is the pain of sin, itself. What

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Farinata suffers from, as the scene tells us, is the ache of pride and the anguish of partisanship. These are the flames and the tomb—the unbendingness and the contempt. Like many another occupant of Hell, Farinata does not know he is in it.

And furthermore it is not love of country, but of party, that animates Farinata. What he has waited so steadfastly to say to Dante is merely this: that the failure of the Ghibellines is torment to him, indeed,—but just let young Alighieri wait: he will pay in time the cost of *his* party's victory.

"But that other, magnanimous, . . . changed not his aspect, nor moved his neck, nor bent his side." The picture is a striking one, especially following immediately upon the dreary collapse of Cavalcanti. And *magnanimous* is a handsome epithet. But how are we to take this word? Clearly it cannot signify generosity of spirit, for Farinata has stood stiff-necked, his face concentrated on his interrupted argument, all during the sad father's emergence. Totally oblivious to his tomb-mate's sorrow and error (again, blindness[5]), he has waited in grim tolerance for the moment when he could again take up his own theme. And yet there is something else in Farinata—an ability to stand up unflinchingly before the pain he brings upon himself, a willingness to hear the "enemy" out in full—to which Dante pays its due in the single word, *magnanimous*.

When Dante has answered Farinata's question (lines 82-84), acknowledging the partisan vengeance of contemporary Florence, the scene enters its final phase. Farinata sighs; and from this point on, the tempo and spirit of the interchange grow pacific. Although no full "recognition" in the Aristotelian sense can possibly occur in Hell (which is by nature the place of those who fail to "recognize"), the man and the shade in this scene now see each other for a moment, not as rivals but as citizens of one city; and Farinata recalls to himself and to the voyager the great moment of his life when love for Florence outweighed partisan anger and saved the city from being razed. Dante questions him on the foresight of the damned, and learns in a literal exposition what the reader knows in its metaphorical extension: that those in Hell are blind to present events. Farinata re-enters his tomb. Dante

[5]Blindness, if one will, with trimmings: for Cavalcanti's son was Farinata's son-in-law, according to history.

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and Virgil move together again alone on the plain. Dante's mind reverts to Farinata's "enemy" words of prophecy; and the canto ends with Virgil's answering reproof: remember what you've heard, but put your mind on the final goal of your journey. He admonishes all partisans.

The dramatic action of this canto of heretics is, then, the dogged clinging to one's own clan, one's own side, with consequent failure to see humanity whole and to live in it accordingly. The "other" man is either an opponent (as Dante in Farinata's view) or else quite imperceptible (as Cavalcanti in Farinata's view); the sense of either injury received or triumph experienced obscures sympathy and upsets equilibrium. The sin of Farinata is linked by this action with that of Epicurus, who divides the wholeness of life by disregarding the soul's immortality, and with that of the Christian heretic, who divides the earthly church. The image of Farinata and Cavalcanti, shut eternally in a single painful tomb, yet unaware of one another, stands for the whole concept of divisiveness. And the circle of the isolated heretics, inside the walls of the City of Dis, but above and distinct from the circles of violence and fraud, forms along with these other two a graduated trio of those modes of action by which man, in Dante's *Comedy*, digs himself deliberately into the dark.

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DOROTHY DONNELLY

## Spider Compared to Star

If one considers attentively the radiant spider
(momentarily moved behind a purple cumulus of aster
but emerging now) the legs outspread in rays,
eight spokes curved from a center scintillant like an asterisk
spaced on pale paper, one sees her starwise.

Head and elliptic maw are in close conjunction
like the merging orbs of a double star; like Rigel
she has no neck: S after all is for swans not stars
which are involute and dispense with antennae, horns, and tails,
retaining (with spiders) only a wreath of retractile rays
whereby the air twinkles set in motion around them.
She is Venus with diamond eyes that gleam like a cat's,
set four-square like the four perfect four-pointed
stars of gold in a floret the size of a fly.
She possesses, waiting for prey, the patience of the fishermen
fiery above in their boats of "millions of years."
(A billion to one is a rough relation of time,
and a spider's night-watch would equal three million years
of star-life.) She is silent, too, as they,
as still as the stony light of an extinct star
that comes to us late like the flower of the dinosaur's footprint
or the spiral bouquet of an ammonite's filigree sutures
since Mesozoic days preserved impeccable under sea-glass.

In June a golden garden-spider floating
slowly across a sky of irises,
neither aimless nor idle, her net nailed
to rafters of roses, shakes with her foot
the diamond outline specked with a black and gold enamel of
gnats,
impassive moves in the midst of a meteor-shower of bees
and comet-wasps stinging the air with fiery whips.
In autumn when dahlias light their ruby lamps
and the gilt grape-leaf hangs, worn to a web by waves of weather,
the spiders stir among the yellow zinnias

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and tall chrysanthemums cinnamon-colored and curved
petal by petal inwardly to solid globes,
moving from point to point in their orbits, sure-footed over
chasms
like the high stars across invisible bridges.

An aerial firmament stretches above the grass a foot or two
like a reduction through glass of airy oceans above.
There suns and mimic constellations stand,
Aldebaran looming large in his silver isosceles
and clear Canopus caught in a skein of light.
Milky Ways of web shine across meadows
and galaxies hang with their islands of black over gardens,
and many unpredictable moons appear,
lemon-yellow or white with shadows of lilac,
and turn on their spiral paths tenacious as planets.
("Geometry, that is to say, the science
of harmony in space, presides over everything.")
In the silence one hears the eloquent spiders and the stars
speak with the incontrovertible voices of things,
saying that certainly the deducible precedes the deduction
and things necessarily antedate theories; they say that
matter is music and sings with iridescent voice
like water moving polychromatic from stone to stone.
Recurring themes built on the tones of a primitive scale
appear now here, now there, in rich confusion,
islands of blue above in the Milky river,
and a white Bear walking the polar sky; below,
echo of skies in the grass, the dew-drop blur
of Pleiades, and a tarantula rayed
like golden Algol fierce among the minor stars.

## Wild Plums at Pha-An

Here is a twilight-piece; in the muted scene
The lake lies pearl beneath the opaline
Shell of sky, and spaces of amethyst light
Open wide like flowers, on the edge of night,
And a pale, towery, dimmed-by-distance hill
Rests on the silver water, shadowier still.

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Pink sifts through the nebulous plum-tree mist
Of flowers floating lightly in swanshaped drift,
And out of paling sky nacreous shadows pass
Across a damask of leafage still as glass;
The lessening light mute as a moving moth
Mottles with lambent mauves the plum-flower-cloth.

On the left a crescent cart of basketry, curved
Like the satin scoop in the fruit where the seed is stored,
Has stopped. The two wheels, quiet as unwound clocks,
Are ritual circles behind the chalk-white ox
Standing impassive with hieratic mask
And animal eyes that neither seek nor ask.

The driver sits, motionless, like a small
Ivory carving, in a closely-folded shawl,
Crouched, with the patience of a plant upon its root,
And secret with the simple secrecy of fruit.
But the one who reclines in the curve of the cart has come
To transfer the transformation of the plum

In the late light, recomposed on a mirror-eye
That takes lake, light, and violet sky
Within, into a magical solitude
Where the swan-winged trees may be forever viewed
In a landscape turned to a pure Arcadian kind
Enhanced by the fadeless gilding of the mind.

## A Concern For Beauty

Who will cavil at a concern for beauty
such as the placing of this potted gorgon's head
with the green stiletto leaves or eel-grass
electrified in all directions in the window
of a modest establishment, a barber shop?
One would not wish to condemn a flair (though faint)
for form, as shown in this elemental attempt
at symmetry: space with an object in its middle.

Here is the bristling outline of an extrovert
with nothing supine about it like hair on the head;

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it looks like a vegetable hedgehog; if it were animal
one would say that it appeared frightening because frightened.
It is not, precisely, a prepossessing plant
but it provokes speculation and invites comparisons
like the dark lady of the sonnets, or the sphinx,
or other poetic presences that haunt our air.

It is a kind of mathematico-symbolic head
with thoughts projecting sword-like from every point,
it is sunburst, spiny sphere, gem with congealed rays,
a fountain's caricature, an isometric explosion,
or the abstract image of an acrid and
echinate personality, definitely
a desert type imitable in such media
as plastic, glass, or stiffly wired horsehair.

One may feel he is looking on beauty a little bare
viewing through glass this unaccompanied shrub.
Who would dream of asking more of a sky than one sun?
A monomial organization at least eliminates
redundancy; and for those who care for such things
there is precedent: Wordsworth's single violet
by a stone, and the calm of an uncrowded canvas with
one hill or one heron, enough for a Japanese eye.

Sometimes an excess of space is necessary to a scene,
like long idle lawns leading to a ruin
or expanses of velvet as foil for one emerald's fire.
This plant armed heavily with spines needs space
like a ballerina who must have room for the circle
of her skirts, like a swan in need of an empty oval,
a background sky, a cloud, a mirror, or a river
for the adequate rendition of its classic profile.

Here in a magic-lantern scene is centered a green sun,
a glittering planet that glows through gilt air toward the eye
like an aquarium-denizen outspread in its tentacle-wreath,
gleaming through glass like a watermark through paper.
Its maker has entered imagination's secret groves
and achieved, along with the shapers of fountains, arches,
and facades, a personal transmutation of space,
enlarging the landscape of the world with one bright island.

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STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN

# Some Notes on the Albertine Strategy

ROBIE MACAULEY'S FIRST NOVEL, *The Disguises of Love* (Random House) appeared late in 1952 and was warmly received by almost everyone. Here was a novel that dealt unabashedly with love, a topic fairly unpopular with serious novelists of our day, and dealt with it intelligently and compassionately, although the author seemed to be neither a Victorian nor a Catholic convert. Macauley's shifting narrative viewpoint, seeing the action through the eyes of three of his tormented principal actors, gave complexity and ambiguity to what might otherwise have been a fairly conventional story of adultery, and there was general agreement that his prose had style, ironic humor, and even a certain wit, sometimes verging on parody. If it was not a Dostoevskian plumbing of the corrupt human heart, some soundings at least were made, and if the conversations between his adulterous couple sometimes resembled nothing so much as the dialogues between Auden and Eckermann that have been appearing in our literary papers, any conversation between bedmates more elaborate than discussions of where the hell the pack of cigarettes had got to were rare in our fiction. Macauley, who had a reputation as the author of some impressive short stories and as one of the principal sponsors of the nine-days-wonder Ford Madox Ford revival, was clearly a novelist to consider.

The principal uneasiness that many readers of the novel felt, that it somehow did not seem to be about the world the rest of us lived in, was probably best expressed by Anthony West in "On the Other Foot", a mocking review of the book in *The New Yorker* for December 20, 1952. West spent his first page in paraphrase, pointing up the reversed sexual roles in the book's plot. Here was the frail pushover of a hero, Howard Graeme, husband, father, and professor of psychology at a midwest university; here was the villainous seducer, a young student named Frances in one of his classes. West describes her decision to "have her will of him", and her campaign too subtle to "make any man suspicious of the honorableness of a woman's intentions", beginning with Brahms and ending in a country hotel where she has reserved a double room in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Sewell of Pontiac, Michigan (West neglects to add that she has previously bought a suitcase for him, packed it with outsize pajamas, toilet articles, and shaving equipment, and somehow succeeded in smuggling it into the trunk of his car, along with her own case, previous to their date). After Howard has lost his virtue, protesting "I'm not that kind of a man", West reports, it is obvious that the villain was only toying with his affections, and that after compromising him and ruining his life, Frances plans to desert him and go her blithe way.

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Comic and distorted as West's paraphrase is (and my brief paragraph hardly does it justice), it is not really unfair to the book's basic structure, although it blurs such complicating detail as Frances' apparent own real involvement and suffering, and Howard's moments of acute self-perception. As an account of typical sexual relations in our society, Macauley's plot is, as West fairly says, "nonsensical" and "altogether absurd", and it is hard to picture even the most atypical wolfish coed and chaste professor behaving in quite this fashion. Having accurately posed the problem, however, West gives an explanation that is at least equally absurd, that our struggling young novelists, dreading women as threats of domestic responsibility that may blight their careers, project these fears into male Clarissa characters. Macauley's topsy-turvy plot, West implies, represents a general problem in our literary economy, and as such it is just too bad.

I would submit that something else is involved. Macauley's novel seems to me merely the latest in a large body of recent works of fiction in which, with what I should imagine are varying degrees of consciousness in the author, accounts of homosexual relations are disguised as accounts of heterosexual relations. If we imagine Macauley's middle-aged psychology professor as seduced, not by a student named Frances, but by, let us say, a student named Francis, much that was previously unreasonable in the book falls into place. Before examining some of the evidence, however, let us look at the device itself, calling it, for convenience and in honor of Marcel Proust, its most famous modern practitioner, the Albertine Strategy. When Proust, with full consciousness, changed "Albert" to "Albertine", he was motivated not only by an impulse to discretion—along the lines of his famous advice to Gide—but, we can imagine, by a relatively pure aesthetic desire to put the experience of tormented love in more conventional heterosexual terms and thus make it more readily accessible to the majority of his readers. In our own time, this has become an impersonal problem; even the most ruggedly heterosexual novelist finds homosexual relations so pervasive in his environment that they tend to force themselves on him as subject matter. Since their direct expression in fiction, if not actually taboo, would tend to make his novel culty and special, and even (because of the widespread popular confusion between art and life) to reflect on the author, our novelists have no choice but to metamorphose gender as ruthlessly as any Danish surgeon.

We can see this strategy work itself out on a whole spectrum of complexity. At the simplest extreme, we have such a story as Tennessee Williams' *Rubio y Morena,* which appeared in *Partisan Review,* December, 1948. It tells of a writer named Kamrowski, "not an especially good writer", and his adoption by a tall, simple, half-Indian Mexican girl who moves in with him for a year or so, does wonders for his sexual and literary powers, steals small amounts of his money, is taken ill and crawls home to die, and is there confronted on her deathbed by Kamrowski in a final scene that brings him out of his emotional

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isolation into some kind of shared human suffering, which he evidences by stealing a child's doll at her funeral and running off to cry. This girl, Amada, first appears as a figure "so tall that he took it to be a man", her companionship is easy for Kamrowski although he found "even the companionship of men" difficult, her hands "were large as a man's", her dark figure, "even mistaken at first for that of a man", never quite comes into the light; dying she calls to him in a loud, hoarse voice "like the crow of a cock" and is seen "wearing a man's undershirt" on "the flat bosom". Amada is, in fact, a man, with only the most perfunctory disguise, and Williams' touching and rather absurd story is no less—and no more—touching or absurd for this simple transformation.

At the other end of the spectrum is a very complicated novelette, *The Servant,* by Robin Maugham, first published in 1949 (Harcourt, Brace) and since reprinted in a paperbound edition (Avon). Maugham's short novel or long story tells of a weak-willed young English gentleman, Tony, corrupted by a wicked manservant named Barrett, who plays on his slothful and comfort-loving nature. Barrett estranges Tony from his fiancée, a fine girl named Sally, breaks up his friendship with Richard Merton, the narrator, and brings him at the book's finish to a state of bloated and alcoholic ruin, living in the servants' quarters of his house on a first-name basis of equality with Barrett, the two of them doing crossword puzzles together and indulging in unnamed sexual practices. The specific agent of this corruption is a young girl, Vera, surely the most preposterous adolescent nymphomaniac in fiction, who is introduced into the house by Barrett as his niece when she is in fact his paramour, is promptly slipped into bed with Tony, and by the time she has been cast out by Barrett to solicit on the London streets has so depraved Tony that she can be succeeded by an infinite series of half-grown girls Barrett procures for the two of them. Barrett's corruption of Tony is explicitly sexual, apart from those crossword puzzles, but it is always made clear that it consists in some nameless viciousness involving young girls.

However, taking as a clue Richard's wonderful suggestion to Tony about what he and Barrett do evenings, "I suppose you have long discussions on Proust", we might note some of the book's imagery. Barrett's entry into Tony's service is marked by his painting the dark rooms cream, covering the chairs with "a gay yellow chintz", and setting out flowers. He is the perfect servant, a wonderful cook, and the king of black market shoppers. He speaks in "a prissy, affected voice" or a "high-pitched, querulous" one. He has in his sallow "slimy" face incongruous "rosebud lips", which give him "the look of a dissolute cherub". Tony speaks of Barrett whenever the servant is criticized as though he were a habit or a vice, "I could get rid of him tomorrow if I wanted to", but when Tony does sack him, he soon reinstates him. Barrett has the odd habit of crushing nuts between his fingers. He is often described in phallic imagery, as "like a snake as he wound his way carefully across the crowded

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little room", as "a fantastically shaped log" with "its other side swarming with lice", and his "long thin body was green and horrible in the moonlight". Near the end of the story he is finally identified with Tony's Nanny, the only person in Tony's childhood who really loved him.

Unflattering as many of these images are, they insist on translating as a simple homosexual involvement, and the girl Vera—whose first physical encounter with Tony is in the image of oral eroticism: "Then with a spasm of joy he felt her tongue sliding through his lips"—would be no more than the projection or concretization of that relationship, an agent created to symbolize and somewhat disguise an act. This is not particularly complex, but as soon as it is evident, the reader realizes that there is one additional twister, that the relationship between the old friend Richard, the narrator, and Tony is itself symbolically homosexual, but homosexual-weighted-good rather than homosexual-weighted-bad, and that *its* concretization is Sally, the fine girl Tony could and should have married. From the moment early in the book when Richard watches Tony in the bath, noticing that he is lean and muscular, and only seems fat because of his fleshy face and broad thighs, to the final scene when Tony has become "fat, almost gross", it is Richard who battles Barrett for him. When Sally forces Tony to choose between Barrett and herself (after telling Richard she was losing Tony, not to another woman, but to "another man", Barrett) and he chooses the servant, the scene only foreshadows the final conflict, when Richard gives Tony the same choice, pleading "Come with me" and "I'll do all I can to make you happy", and Tony again chooses Barrett. If Vera concretizes Barrett's profane love, and Sally does the same for Richard's sacred love, and both are in fact homosexual attachments to Tony, then we are left with a very different triangle than the odd polygon with which we started. In the imaginative world of *The Servant*, on some deeper level, no women exist at all.

We can find variants of the Albertine Strategy, if we care to look for them, in the fiction of Paul Bowles, in Tennessee Williams' plays, in such films as *All About Eve*, in almost every facet of our language-using culture. Robie Macauley's *The Disguises of Love* is significant, perhaps, because of the possibility that here we have its conscious parody, that Macauley has not only anticipated our investigations but even assisted them by pointing up the evidence. What better title for such an effort, we must note, than *The Disguises of Love*? Howard's wife Helen reads the evidence for the affair with Frances as Howard's writing a book, and thinks "I should write a book about the feelings of a woman whose husband is writing a book", but the author has actually written a book about the feelings of a woman who disguises her husband's affair to herself as his writing a book, has in turn disguised it to us as a book about an affair between a mannish girl and a girlish man, and has created something like the bookish convolutions-within-convolutions of *The Counterfeiters*.

The theme of gender reversal runs all through the story. Frances first appears

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in the book in an old tan raincoat, like Eve in *All About Eve*, and first greets Howard with a manly handshake. Throughout the affair, Gordon, the Graemes' adolescent son, believes that it is his mother having a liaison with "Another Man". When, in a compromising scene, an annoying kid on the street has to be driven away with a rock, it is Frances' sturdy right arm that pegs it. When, during the later faculty gossip, the wife of a colleague talks obliquely about the rumors involving Howard as "Say one of the faculty members was the subject of a lot of rumors for shoplifting, say," her husband remarks, "You're mixing your sexes. Shoplifting is a woman's crime." The reaction of another colleague to the gossip is, "I can hardly believe it. I thought he hated women." Helen meditates with the same ambiguity after she learns about the affair: "How could he have fallen for some cheap feather-headed blonde? Or, stranger than that, how could some feather-brained little blonde have fallen for him?" When Helen reconstructs the events, she reverses the roles of dominance and subordination, and imagines that Howard made all the decisions.

In Macauley's principal irony, the adultery is a triumph for Helen: the general sympathy makes her a social success, the desexualization of her marriage makes her husband more satisfactory, "more like an older brother", and it is her freedom from a harsh and tyrannous master she is fighting for when she races to the airport at the end of the novel to make sure that Howard *does* get off with Frances. The precocious son Gordon, who hides the *History of Philosophy* he is reading behind comic books, fights a truceless war against positivism and conformity, and as much as anyone seems to be the author's spokesman (his jottings, some of them rather brilliant, suggest that he has years of his creator's journals to draw on), has none of the usual adolescent's exacerbated sexuality. He wonders whether marriage is not always a biological anomaly like the relation between a cat and a dog, and it is probably no accident that the isolated word "parthenogenesis" is dropped in the book with the same sort of casual thud that "metempsychosis" gets in *Ulysses*. Gordon's constant imagery for women is one of physical repulsion: an African woman so steatopygous that once sitting down she could not rise to her feet on level ground, his mother with "hair like faded lettuce", one woman who looks like a horse, another who has a radish for a nose, his teacher ending up as a raddled old prostitute in the jungle, wearing nothing but a pair of outsize false teeth fitted by a native dentist. Gordon's one adult friend and confidant, an eccentric professor of the humanities, is described, perhaps punningly, as "pear-shaped", and when Gordon is finally attracted to a girl, it is to an Indian girl swathed ambiguously in a sari. The theme of Macauley's book is outgoing human love, but of this commodity Frances has none, Helen and Gordon have very little, and Howard, the only character who genuinely loves another human being with something approaching selflessness, is left ridiculous in it.

All three of these works of fiction seem to center around some vital conflict

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between *agape* and *eros,* what we have been loosely calling sacred and profane love, and polarize their imagery accordingly. In Macauley's book, *agape* (Paul's *caritas*) seems to be symbolized as water: Howard thinks of "the reservoir of mutual feeling" he and Helen had once had, now dried up; Helen sees her private life as a swimming pool her family always wanted to wallow and splash in; Gordon observes his professor's manner as one of drying off his guests with a turkish towel; it is in a boat on a lake, the lake phrased as the return to childhood and the possibility of redemption, that Howard and Gordon almost attain communion, spoiled when Howard, "angling" for Gordon's sympathy, falls into the real water. *Agape's* opposite, *eros,* is the complementary fire, particularly the flaming trees of autumn, some of them crimson enough to resemble blood, which Howard associates with his happiness with Frances and the coming to life of his senses. In this dichotomy of flaming colors and translucence, Frances sees sin as "dark", Howard, inspired by a fine poem of Ransom's, as white ("milky", "ivory"), and everything turns to neutral gray for him "outside the warm circle of Frances' persuasion".

The Tennessee Williams story centers around the same color-value opposition (its title translates as "Blond and Dark"), with the impersonal and undemanding love of Amada (*agape*) the dark, and Kamrowski's selfish love (*eros*) the blond. *The Servant* almost directly reverses Macauley's polarities, beginning the happy friendship of Tony and Richard with the book's opening line "London was blowsy with heat that summer evening", and after the final break, concluding on the cold, moist, heavens-weeping-for-the-protagonist imagery Hemingway has made his own: "The fog was so thick that sometimes I would get lost in stretches of deep blackness between the circles of light from the lampposts. I knew it would be a long journey before I reached home."

*Agape,* like *eros,* may be homosexual, as it is in both *The Servant* and *Rubio y Morena,* but it is a homosexual love selfless and purged: Amada must die for it, Vera be banished, Sally go off to Rhodesia, Richard walk alone through the fog, Kamrowski end up clutching a sexless doll as his only trophy. When Howard dies spiritually at the end of *The Disguises of Love,* in the much-quoted lines "If the dead are happy, I was happy. If the dead are satisfied, I was satisfied", it is a death that represents the victory of neither principle, not at all the happy immolation in the ocean he described earlier in the book as a childhood memory (when he tried to hit and bite the man who saved him from drowning). It is a tribute to Macauley's greater honesty and superior powers that his book avoids the easy patnesses that content Maugham and Williams, but is it not perhaps a final irony that one of the disguises love can take—in this case the craftsman's love—is a book whose ultimate lovelessness is so impregnable that neither *agape* nor *eros* can enter in?

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WILLIAM BECKER

# The Play As Play

THE IDEA THAT THERE IS SOMETHING which can be called "pure theatre" is almost certainly a figment. On the other hand, there do exist forms of theatre which can be appreciated only as theatre—which is to say, as *play*, in both senses of that word. From such forms, we do not necessarily ask that the rendition of life be tragic or comic or satirical, or even thoughtful in an intellectual way, but merely that it be theatrical. We ask, in short, for performance, for play, for a relatively pure and unencumbered invocation of the "histrionic sensibility."[1] On the crudest level, these forms belong to the circus and the music-hall; on a high literary level, they expose themselves through a playwright like Marivaux. On whatever level, they may be said to act as a kind of permanent floor to theatre—not always adequate in themselves, but composing an essential stuff, in the absence of which it would be impossible for theatre to have any independent existence as an art-form.

Once we understand this, it is possible to account for one crucial difference between Broadway, where this fundamental sense of theatre has never taken much root, and Europe, where it is the main source of theatrical tradition and the most evident element of discipline in the theatrical milieu. Up to a point, the history of theatre is always the history of certain novelties: we tend to define our position in terms of those "new ideas" which inform our plays, or those "new techniques" of which our staging is composed, or those "new interpretations" which we impose on the traditional repertoire. This tendency is especially noticeable in America where theatre as we know it was actually created out of twentieth-century novelty-mongering, and is now resolutely committed to the idea of newness as the only conceivable vitality. Yet this persistent hankering after novelty is unwholesome, not merely because it can only be satisfied at an exorbitant cost in quality (there simply aren't that many "new" things which are good), but also because it tends to obscure the fact that theatre does have a fundamental life apart from the novelties imposed on it. We forget, to our peril, that in the absence of genuinely fine novelties, we would do far better simply to attend to that fundamental life—as it were, to play on that permanent floor.

Consider, for example, the present state of things in Paris. Immediately after the war, Paris theatre was full of novelties, many of them of a high

[1]Francis Fergusson deserves our gratitude for coining this useful phrase, even though he somewhat spoiled it (as, in fact, he spoiled many of the "concepts" in *The Idea of a Theatre*) by a pretentious usage which was seemingly calculated to make the phrase sound bigger and more profound than it has any need to be.

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order. In fact, the political liberation was generally paralleled by a cultural liberation which infused even the established pre-war ideas and personalities with a sense of exhilaration, with the result that nearly everything which took place in theatre gave one the impression of a novel freshness. There was Existentialism, there was the cult of Artaud-le-Momo, there was the emergence of Barrault as the most impressive product of the Copeau tradition, there was Decroux and his mime school, there was Jouvet, there were brilliant young stylists like Les Frères Jacques and the Compagnie Grenier-Hussenot (both of these groups played at the Club de la Rose Rouge, near St. Germain-des-Près, and drew heavily on the startling talent of Jacques Prévert who supplied them with songs and sketches), as well as experimental companies in every Paris alley, being supplied with plays by self-consciously avant-garde writers like Audiberti, de Ghelderode, and Henri Pichette. There were also, of course, new works from established writers like Anouilh, Montherlant, Obey, Sartre, Camus, and Cocteau. By now most of the exhilaration has subsided, and the scene is very different. Jouvet is dead; so are Copeau and Dullin. Barrault has achieved eminence and spends a good deal of time out of Paris on world tours. Many of the experimental theatres are closed; none of them has anything very special or startling to offer: the most recent production of the Grenier-Hussenot, for example, was Irwin Shaw's *The Gentle People*. Out of the countless groups devoted in some measure to the development of mime as an individual art, only Marcel Marceau remains fruitfully at work. There are no new playwrights, and the old playwrights like Obey and Anouilh are not improving. Nor is there any new company to evoke the kind of enthusiasm Barrault evoked six or seven years ago. In short, the Parisian theatre is just now as bereft of novel resources as Broadway; yet it leads, nonetheless, an incredibly rich and solid life. Partly this is because what seemed like a let-down was in some degree only a separation of the sheep from the goats: the pseudo-talents (which made their own contribution to the general excitement) have largely disappeared. But more important is the fact that in Paris theatrical riches need not in the least depend on theatrical novelties, and that even as the novelties pass off or are absorbed, a more primary vitality is brought into view.

The traditional focus of any such primary vitality is, of course, the Comédie Française. For it is precisely the Comédie's business to serve a fundamental, immediate, and, so to speak, uncommitted vision of theatre. It exists to guarantee a traditional life not only to the genius of French dramaturgy, but to those fine sensibilities implicit in all the best of French culture, and nowhere so remarkable as in French acting. No other institution, as Henry James was fond of discovering, embodies as magnificently the essential genius of French civilization. It is therefore to the Comédie that the present visitor in Paris will find himself most frequently drawn. And he will almost certainly come to feel that this attraction represents a state of things much more properly in joint

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than that profusion of novelties which a few years ago tended to transgress (one might even say, subvert) the Comédie's absolute and rightful pre-eminence.

The word "traditional" comes so readily to mind when one begins to analyse the special qualities that distinguish the Comédie Française that it is important to understand what it implies in such a context. For traditions at the Comédie are not a form of cultural reaction: they have nothing to do with an addiction to customary usage of the kind that is often associated with performances of grand opera or that is so grimly in evidence at a theatre like the Abbey in Dublin. One never thinks of them in connection with sets or costumes or *jeux de scène,* or indeed with any of the externals of theatre production. A measure of their distinction is that no one ever invokes them to justify anything. Yet what these traditions (outside those that pertain to the repertoire) positively *are* is difficult to define. Henry James characterized them as "a most beneficent reality"; and this reality is made up, not of laws or special formulations, but of an accumulated experience which amounts to a kind of discipline in the very atmosphere of the place. By and large, the Comédie's tradition derives not so much from the venerability of the heritage, but from the sheer amount of work and craft that the heritage represents. The traditions are sustained, not by a pious contemplation of the past, but by a prolific activity in the present. There are and have been so many plays, so many productions, so many performances, such a continuous activity in behalf of plays and the theatre, that the work itself is the center of everything. The Comédie operates, in short, in the way that an individual artist does, and with perhaps fewer distractions than the ordinary artist. Thus what the Comédie's traditions mainly provide is a profound respect that is absolutely functional in the day-to-day business of creating theatre—a respect for the language, for the repertoire, for the profession itself. And one gets a sense of professionalism as nowhere else. The consummate attention to detail which is another of the Comédie's traditional marks bespeaks a training which has been handed down, not so much in technical particulars as in the very idea of training—a sense that acting is a difficult and perfected craft to which one aspires not through introspection but through exercises, through practice, and through a devoted service to the art of Molière. That the Comédie is still called *la maison de Molière* tells as much about the Comédie's tradition as anyone needs to know. It indicates the degree of dependence on the traditional repertoire which both precedes and commands the respect in which it is held. And perhaps the most important thing about this respect and this familiarity is that it proscribes fear. An actor who can perfectly serve Molière can perfectly serve any playwright, with the possible exception of Shakespeare. If in America we lack a craft of acting, it is largely because we are intimidated by those classic examples of our art which could confer a sense of craft. Demand the classics, and everyone,

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in practice if not in theory, has his own defense mechanism, his own apology, his own protestation. And ironically, one finds that the more academic or lettered the interpreters, the more violent the protestation: one thinks off-hand of the Brattle Theatre people, Francis Fergusson, Harry Levin, Maurice Valency —all supporters, in one way or another, of the gimmick, the adaptation, the contemporary reference, the "analogous action". In America one may take the classics, but one does not take them straight—which is to say, *as plays*. A classic is at best a troublesome script. One often hears it complained that we do not know what to "do" with the classics, but have we to "do" something? The question, of course, only comes up because nothing has been "done" for us. At the Comédie, it is tradition which sanctions an interpretation, and tradition which gives contrast and meaning to the departure. For in every case, it is the force of tradition which has created a sense of style, and can assure that whatever is done, is done consistently. It seems preposterous to have to say that the first thing to "do" with a play is to perform it. Yet as last season's experience of Shakespeare under City Center management (*quondam* the Brattle management) demonstrated with awful clarity, those things which get the least attention—and sometimes no attention at all—are these fundamentals which belong to a conception of the play as play: performance, style, clarity, and consistency. These are the first things which at the Comédie come first. They comprise the essential art: all the rest is the application of craft. It is moreover the *sense* of these things, a sense inherent in the very atmosphere of the Comédie, which most adequately suggests the meaning of "tradition" in the context of the Comédie Française.

All this is particularly apparent at the moment for two reasons. One is that the Comédie now has assembled an exceptionally fine company. The other is that the individual talents in the company and the tastes of the directors and administrators have conspired to augment the traditional value placed on performance itself. One gradually becomes aware that something more than the tradition is at work, that style has become a thoroughly conscious preoccupation. Vitalism of a purely histrionic kind has become an end in itself. In general, the Comédie style has two aspects: one is rhetorical, the other physical. These are the two principle lines of training to which all apprentice actors are subjected at the Conservatoire. The only decadence I have ever known at the Comédie consisted in an unbalance of these two aspects—in this case, an unbalance which minimized the body in favor of the voice (the opposite unbalance would be much less likely to occur, considering the force of rhetoric in French education as a whole). Five years ago I saw several productions which had gone stale in this way. One was a production of *Tartuffe* which has now been replaced by a wholly new production in an entirely different manner. The old *Tartuffe* was not merely drab to look at; it had very little real histrionic quality. Remembering it now, the impression that remains most urgently is of the

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number of speeches delivered while the actors were seated. I try to recall the movement or the gestures, and I can only picture those sweeping arm-movements that accompanied the rhythmic flow of the verse: I can remember nothing that could be described as full bodily gesture. For all its shabbiness, that old production had a kind of dignity, and it did not misrepresent the play. But by comparison to the new production, it lacked an essential vitality; and this vitality is now supplied largely by sheer physical energy, by brilliant, very speedy, and well-timed *jeux de scène*. The scene in which Tartuffe makes passes at Orgon's wife while Orgon is hidden beneath the table was reasonably funny in the old production; in the new one it is a consummate bit of comic business, magnificently performed, and timed to a pitch of perfection. It has a greater variety of pace than the older production because the rhythm of the action is not so totally controlled by the declamatory rhythm of the lines. The whole production is informed in the same way by a full mimetic activity which underscores the meaning of the lines by putting them more precisely to work. The rhythms and rhymes of the verse have been put in their place. Which, of course, does not mean that they have been neglected; on the contrary, they have been utilized: they have ceased, as it were, to stew soggily in their own juice.

It is difficult to determine what brought this new manner about. The prevailing consistency at the Comédie tends to turn any such inquiry into a question of the chicken and the egg. It is undeniable that the technique of mime and the refurbishing of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition have been among the most distinctive forces at work in the French theatre for perhaps thirty years. The Comédie for all its singularity is by no means aloof from such forces. It could not be: every actor of real merit in France has worked there. In fact, the best-known representative of the mimetic style—Jean-Louis Barrault—had his start at the Comédie; so did his wife and partner, Madeleine Renaud; and one could argue that the Comédie remains even now the most apparent shaping force in their work—far more profound than the influence of any of those whom Barrault likes to regard as his mentors: Decroux, Artaud, Craig, Copeau. It may be that the success of Barrault has contributed to the present spirit at the Comédie; it is more likely that both Barrault and the present Comédie troupe are creations of the same general ambience. The important fact is that the actors who now seem most "characteristic" of the best Comédie work are those in whom the "histrionic sensibility" is purest and most in evidence. Even more significant is the constitution of the present repertoire.

Molière is, of course, the Comédie's very breath of life. Most of his important plays are constantly in the repertoire: during the couple of months I spent in Paris recently, one could have seen *Le Misanthrope, Le Médecin malgré lui, L'Avare, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Les Fourberies de Scapin, Le Dépit amoureux, Les Précieuses ridicules, Sganarelle, Le Tartuffe*, and *Don Juan*. The popularity of Molière is unvarying; he is always there, and he is always good.

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One comes to assume Molière, even while constantly rediscovering him; and if one is trying to perceive some special polemic evident in the repertoire, it is to the plays which fill out the repertoire that one must usually look. Moreover, at any given time, there are always some productions which are more brilliant than others; there are ordinarily half a dozen which are especially popular, and for which it is difficult to arrange the better seats. These are the productions which tend to give the Comédie whatever special quality it may temporarily have. At the present time, I would name, among productions of this sort: the two Marivaux plays, *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard* and *La Double Inconstance,* the two Jules Romains plays, *Donogoo* and *M. le Trouhadec saisi par la Débauche,* Feydeau's *Le Dindon,* Pirandello's *Six Personnages en quête d'Auteur,* and Musset's little proverb play, *On ne saurait penser à tout.* Among the Molières, by far the most exciting are the newest productions—*Le Misanthrope, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme,* and *Le Tartuffe*—and this fact is perhaps the highest tribute to the present company, its administration, its style, and its taste.[2]

The chief point about this repertoire, however, is that all the outstanding things in it are plays which require not merely a high quality but a high degree of what one might call Histrionic Vitalism. They are all plays which belong to a theatre conceived as play (an ambiguity which can be rendered even better in French as *un théâtre qui joue*). It will be noted that all but one of these plays are comedies or farces, and that the single exception—*Six Characters in Search of an Author*—is an exception only in theme, not in the fundamental theatrical gesture which it makes. If the relation of Pirandello to the great tradition of Latin comedy still needed to be demonstrated, his present place in the Comédie repertoire would conclusively do so.

In many respects, in fact, *Six Characters* provides the most stunning theatrical experience of any production in the present repertoire. And it does so precisely because it utilizes the extraordinary Histrionic Vitalism of the current company, not so much for its own sake, but in direct behalf of important thematic issues. It reveals, as no other production of Pirandello I have ever seen, the fundamental relation of Pirandello's "ideas" to his theatrical genius—a relation in which the ideas are not primarily argued, or even maintained, but *played.* "One of the novelties that I have given to the modern drama," Piran-

[2]It should be remembered that since 1946 the two houses of the Comédie are under a single administration and draw on the talents of a single company. Before 1946, the real Comédie Française operated in the Théâtre Français on the Rue de Richelieu at Palais Royal. A second company, also subsidized by the government, but which played chiefly modern works, was installed at the Odéon near the Luxembourg gardens. On the whole, productions at the Odéon used to be much inferior to those at the Français, and continued to be so even after the nominal change. It is only in the last few years that the Odéon has been wholly absorbed. The two houses are now referred to as the Salle Richelieu and the Salle Luxembourg—both of the Comédie Française. As a theatre, the Salle Luxembourg is somewhat more comfortable than the Salle Richelieu (neither is greatly to be desired on this score) but it remains, of course, less hallowed.

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dello once said, "consists in converting the intellect into passion." To this one must add that the form of passion with which Pirandello is concerned is one which only theatre among all the arts can justly render. Thus Pirandello's "ideas" can be expressed with far greater accuracy in the vitalistic contrasts of a performance, than in the formulated versions which dot the speeches of his raisonneurs. Especially is this so in *Six Characters* where Pirandello is doing several highly complicated things at once, and fusing them all into a single theatrical gesture. He is saying something about the nature of art in general and of the theatre in particular; he is probing dramatically that sense of guilt which binds human beings together in traumatic relationships from which they cannot escape; and he is demonstrating a fundamental fact about human existence. None of these things can, of course, be fully separated—even intellectually; but they do all basically depend on this last endeavor. Pirandello's dramatic existentialism is the very core of the play: it is established in the central contrast which the play makes between the Six Characters who have *essence*, and the actors of the theatre who merely have *existence*. The contrast is at once a form, a technique, and a theme. The point is made again and again—always histrionically—that life is less real than art; that it lacks essential humanity, essential compassion, essential vitality. On the Comédie stage, this contrast was scrupulously maintained in a variety of ways, but chiefly through a contrast in the degree of Histrionic Vitalism evident in the performances of the Six Characters on the one hand, and the Actors on the other. From the moment the Six Characters make their entrance—suddenly, out of nowhere, on an elevator that comes up from beneath the stage (a device originally introduced by Pitoëff)—they are set apart from everyone else on stage. In appearance, they have a startling homogeneity; the Mother, the Step-Daughter, and the Girl-Child are all in black; the Father, the Son, and the Boy-Child in plain, rather drab clothes. But their appearance would only be a technical crutch, if they did not manage to distinguish themselves much more theatrically by the sheer intensity of their performances. As performers, they bore the same relation to the real Actors of the play, as the most gifted *Comédien* bears to the ordinary Broadway matinée idol. Even within the circle of the Six Characters, the quality of the performances, more than the lines themselves, projected the rather abstract and schematic conception which Pirandello had in mind. He tells us that some of the Characters were more fully conceived than others, when their Author decided to discard them. And significantly, it is the Step-Daughter, the most "passionate" of the Characters, who is the most fully conceived. The Father, who is the most "intellectual", remains equivocal and unresolved; he belongs generally to the category of Pirandello's *raisonneurs*, but his commitment in the situation prevents his becoming quite complete, like, say, Laudisi in *Right You Are!* It was, therefore, Maria Casarès, as the Step-Daughter, who ruled the stage; and she did it with a kind of maniacal presence.

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Nor was it so much *what* she did as the perfectly timed extravagance of it all. At every moment, she seemed utterly unadulterated: each of her actions, gestures, speeches, emotions, was delivered full strength. Her grotesque bursts of mocking, ironical laughter punctuated the performance like a leit-motif, and came each time with identical force and timbre. She had the same hyperbolic purity in her tenderness with the Girl-Child, in her contempt for the Son, in her arrestingly sensuous physicality. The Father, on the other hand, as played by Ledoux (the one genuinely great actor the Comédie now has), projected an entirely different sort of intensity—that of the apologist, an intensity of obvious restraint. One noticed the urgency of his stance: his shoulders slightly depressed, his head and neck jutting forward a bit, his hat clutched with both hands and held in front of his chest. The subtle balance which he maintained between apology and explanation, his defensiveness and his eagerness, his tension and his restraint, were all *there* in the stance itself. Only at certain crucial moments did he break out into the broad gestures and fine rhetoric of which he is a master; and in the context he established, these moments of the fullest performance became great ones. The least fully conceived of the Characters is the Son, and this fact, too, was played. His sullen detachment from the others is easily enough rendered in any production; but beyond that, in this production, a precise physical equivalent for his half-unformed state was found: he became awkward and uncontrolled in his movements, as uncoordinated as he was uncreated. It was a brilliant touch among many. Yet one realized that only through performances like these, which nothing less than a perfect mastery of Histrionic Vitalism can produce, does Pirandello come fully alive as a theatrical giant in the great tradition. Pirandello may yet have an incomparable service to perform in behalf of our serious drama: one could well find him becoming to a new acting style what Tchekov was to the one which has recently burned out. For no other modern playwright can teach us so effectively what it means to transform ideas into theatre—a lesson which no one in America, neither actors nor playwrights, has yet learned.

Yet it must be admitted that *Six Characters* does not fully justify an argument for "the play as play". It is too great, too overwhelming, and too serious. Much more to the point is the case of Marivaux. Marivaux has had a peculiar history. In 1881, Sarcey took note of the low esteem in which Marivaux was held by his contemporaries and for some fifty years after his death (1763). By Sarcey's own time—a time, it should be noted, of a great confluence of acting talent at the Comédie—Marivaux had become important. Henry James spoke of him in the same breath with Molière. But after Sarcey and James, Marivaux sank again—this time beneath the powerful tide of realism and the drama of ideas. It is still customary for academicians and historians of the drama to treat Marivaux as a low point: the trick is accomplished by comparing him with Molière on identical terms. Witness John Gassner: "During the regency which

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followed the death of Louis XIV, the Italian comedians, who had excellent actors in their midst, gained ascendancy once they discarded their own language and produced French comedies largely supplied by the sentimental Marivaux, whose preciosity and lack of satirical power ushered in a reaction to the high comedy of his great predecessor." Yet in France, in the post-war period, Marivaux has once again come into his own. That he has done so under the twin aegis of the Barrault company and the Comédie of the last few years is no accident. For if we are searching after the chimera of "pure theatre", it is Marivaux who can show us the nearest thing that exists.

Marivaux is the figure through whom the Italian Commedia dell'arte tradition was finally fused into French drama. Influences of a more or less direct kind had been operative before, notably on Molière, but it was Marivaux who became a purveyor of plays to the "New Italian Troupe" headed by Lelio and Sylvia. (An older company of Italian actors had worked in Paris throughout most of the second half of the seventeenth century: when they disappeared, Boileau wrote, "I pity those poor Italians; it would be better to chase out the French", and Watteau celebrated their memory in a series of famous paintings.) When one seeks out descriptions of the style of these actors, one is likely to find the word "naiveté" figuring most prominently; simplicity and naturalness were the virtues which Marivaux himself demanded: "The actors in my plays", he wrote, "must never seem to feel the value of what they are saying, but the audience should feel it and unravel it." At some point in the late eighteenth century, it became the custom to gimmick Marivaux's plays in performance with extravagant pieces of stage business and buffoonery. At the same time, the word *marivaudage* came into the language, signifying a somewhat absurd preciosity, a pretentious, formal, and tediously drawn-out trifling with words. Neither of these occurrences could have represented the real Marivaux less well; because, for all its superficial sophistication and charm of language, the essence of Marivaux's comedy is quite primitive and straightforward. His are the perfect examples of plays which must be understood as plays, no more, no less. Without wishing to push the analogy too far, one might point out that the spirit of Marivaux's comedy can best be suggested in those terms which anthropologists are inclined to use in writing about Greek comedy. "Tragedy", writes Gilbert Murray, "is the enactment of the death of the Year-Spirit; and comedy is the enactment of his marriage, or rather of the *Comos* [i.e. revel or celebration, rejoicing] which accompanies his marriage. The centre of tragedy is death; the centre of comedy is a union of lovers." The effect of Marivaux, in short, can only be explained or described by such an analogy: the emotion which he engenders is not precise enough to lend itself to intellectual formulation. Marivaux has no "ideas" in the common modern sense of that word (at least not in the plays by which he is best known and to which the Comédie has recently given its attention). Nor does he even have "sentiment" in any-

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thing like the outrageous degree his detractors like to maintain. What he primarily has is a fundamental theatrical sensibility, which is able to provide the occasion for performance, and to evoke a sense of joy or celebration in his audience. It could be (and has been) argued that all his plays are alike; and in a crude sense this would be true. The dissimilarity among his plays is not so much in the character-portraiture at which (in a realistic sense) he is poor, nor in the plot-mechanisms which are nearly all variations of surprise, trickery, and deliberate mix-up in the "game of love", nor in the themes of which there is really only one ("Love is a game which involves the most intricate play"), but in the subtle gradations in the quality of joy which each of his occasions provide. The words are different and the situations are different, but, most of all, the ensuing performances are different. These gradations are such as to defy the critic's attempt to define them; they appeal to and gratify the "histrionic sensibility", and no other human faculty is much involved. The sentimental side of Marivaux is mildly romantic; but in form and technique, he is a stricter classicist even than Molière. He works within a rigid and established set of conventions which derive from the Italians; the environment of his action is always the same; the characters are types first and individuals only a far second. He never makes any attempt to ascribe motives beyond the playing of the game itself, and it is therefore the playing which becomes all-important. Poorly performed Marivaux would be intolerable.

But, of course, Marivaux is not poorly performed at the Comédie, nor *chez* Barrault. On the contrary, Madeleine Renaud is probably the greatest performer of Marivaux heroines since Mlle. Mars of the Comédie (died 1841). And Barrault himself has derived his whole style from the mimetic aspect of the Commedia tradition. He is as surely the modern Arlequin as Renaud is the modern Sylvia. At the Comédie, the group which is chiefly responsible for the Marivaux productions is at least as good as Barrault's and promises to be better, since it is much younger. Moreover, it is the same group which is largely responsible for the other works which belong to the area of "the play as play". Robert Hirsch, who plays Arlequin in *La Double Inconstance,* and Jacques Charon who directed it, are the two stars of Feydeau's *Le Dindon.* (The revival of interest in Feydeau is also due jointly to the Comédie and the Barrault troupe: one of Madeleine Renaud's greatest post-war successes was in the title-role of *Occupe-toi d'Amelie*). Charon, moreover, is responsible for the performance which makes Musset's *On ne saurait penser à tout* such an astonishing delight. Julien Bertheau, who directed *Six Characters,* has the romantic lead in both the Marivaux plays; and Mlle. Michelene Boudet, who is on the verge of becoming a great Sylvia, has leads in both the Marivaux plays and *Le Dindon* as well. Of this group, Charon and Hirsch are the most individually impressive exemplars of the new style. Both have built their technique on a physical perception of action; both are, in a sense, mimes. But their styles are by no means identical.

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Charon is tall and rangy, and his special quality is chiefly the result of his immaculate sense of timing. He has a perfectly precise diction which he spits out at great speed from beneath his thin, taut, typically Gallic upper lip. His movements are often reminiscent of those rather absurdly formal mechanical figurines which used to be attached to fine old music boxes. There is no roundness in his bearing or movement; he is all lines and angles; his legs, his back, and his neck are always perfectly straight. He can quite literally make an audience gasp with astonishment and joy as he plunges decisively into a chair, bending only his hips and one knee; a moment later he will again propel himself upright like a jack-in-the-box, using only that one bent leg for leverage. If it is actually a semi-acrobatic feat, it nevertheless projects theatrically as a consummate piece of grace and control. Moreover, these physical feats are never abstract: they are always used to underscore or punctuate the lines, so that the whole performance is of a piece. Even when Charon is not taking part in the dialogue, he is capable of maintaining a vital presence with his rigid stance and his feet held close together in an approximation of ballet's third position. Often when his speeches do come after such a pause, his body takes on sudden life with his voice; and a characteristic passage will find him pacing the floor with a long and rapid stride, sometimes in meaningless circles, and usually punctuated by little skips and quick military turns. His great parts are all a bit foppish—in the Musset, in *Le Dindon*, in *Le Misanthrope* —and even dripping with lace, he manages to render these without any of the sickening homosexual overtones which British and American actors give to such roles.

Hirsch, on the other hand, is medium-sized and stocky; he is also younger and less experienced than Charon. If Charon's style is mainly a matter of great speed, exact timing, and perfect precision, Hirsch's is created more out of odd bodily tensions, posturings, and a lithe athleticism. In this, he is often close to Barrault's style. His Arlequin in *La Double Inconstance* is very like the Arlequin of Jean-Pierre Granval in Barrault's *Les Fausses Confidences*. If Hirsch is not so perfect as Charon, he is also less typed, and therefore manages a greater variety in his performances. As Arlequin, he delivers a performance which is the very essence of "naiveté"—simple, straight, athletic, and vigorous. He always arrives on stage running, and usually leaves the same way, except when he shuffles sullenly out in dejection, like a punished child, his slapstick held limply down at his side. He has none of Charon's distinguishable tricks, but he manages nonetheless to project an equally remarkable vitality. In *Le Dindon*, for example, he has an entirely different type of role to play. As the curtain goes up on the third act, Hirsch is discovered on stage in his bathrobe after a night of riotous fornication. He is thoroughly exhausted. During the course of the scene, the one thing he wants to do is sleep, but he is continually interrupted: all his amorous exploits begin to work out at once, and three women appear one after the other, offering him their bodies. The situation is

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Feydeau-esque to a degree, and out of it, Hirsch manages to construct a performance that is as funny as anything in the whole repertoire, stumbling wearily across the room, arching and stretching his sore back, attempting to make love to one of the women while his eyelids are falling shut by the moment. The best bit of this love scene is a prolonged piece of mime in which he twists himself into the most outlandish positions, climbing around the couch on all fours, but never finding a posture to ease his aching back, and finally dropping soundly off to sleep. Invention of this sort is not easy to come by. Chaplin might have managed it once, and Sid Caesar could probably come close today; but it takes style, it takes training, and it takes a highly cultivated degree of "histrionic sensibility", and all of these things are today at a premium, except in Paris where they have already created the richest, most satisfying theatre to be found anywhere in the West.

Feydeau, Musset, and Marivaux have all recently been rediscovered under the impulse of these things; other farceurs like Labiche and Courteline have just begun to come into their own again; even Molière has been revitalized. A theatre which is chiefly rhetorical or chiefly realistic (in the Stanislavsky sense) has no place for a drama of this sort; as such, it is constantly in danger of losing touch with something that is really fundamental to theatre as an independent art. In America, for example, we get precious little farce today, and no good comedy of the "playing" kind. The result is that what I have called Histrionic Vitalism is almost unknown among American actors. One complains of the drab repetitions our serious drama now gives us; yet our playwrights are not really more at fault than our actors or our acting studios. A playwright adapts himself to the existing talents just as surely as those talents are in turn moulded by his work. Thus, if we are ever to develop a fresher style either of acting or of playwriting, we shall inevitably have to begin feeding off a considerably different repertoire than the one we are now accustomed to. Some cultivation of "the play as play" could well give us our start; and there are plenty of plays which play waiting to do so.

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WILLIAM MEREDITH

# Letter from Tokyo

In the eight years since Americans came ashore to occupy Japan, they have enjoyed a relationship with the Japanese that must be unique, under the circumstances, for its ease and tolerance—qualities not usually associated with occupiers or Americans abroad. The concessions, naturally and properly, have mostly come from the Japanese, but their success suggests that a willingness and sympathy have existed on both sides. Americans have found themselves impelled by an unexpected congeniality to forego their traditional provinciality, and often leave the country with the feeling that they understand the Japanese in a way that few servicemen understood Europe.

And yet the culture and language barriers have been a good deal more complete here. Few Americans have made any real headway with the spoken language, and only a handful of the occupation and security forces learn to read or write it at all. The sense of familiarity that one acquires seems to result from a deliberate simplification of their customs for foreign consumption by the Japanese. This is seen not only in a number of published guides and explanations of Japanese life, of which the Japan Travel Bureau's series is the best known, but also in the adoption by the Japanese of what they take to be American equivalents when they explain anything. In describing the rather arcane tea ceremony, *Cha-no-yu,* for instance, a guide book compares it to "the sacrament of Holy Communion" while describing the tea itself as "resembling thick spinach soup in consistency, as well as in color". The use of *saki* is elsewhere compared, a little anomalously, to "a quiet cocktail party". These are gross but useful distortions of which few Europeans would be capable in dealing with their own cherished customs.

For Americans who show an interest in their language, the Japanese have as it were unconsciously edited a collection of Commonly Used Words and Phrases which, by their recurrence, give you the illusion of familiarity with the language, much the way *sukyaki* and shrimp *tempura* (available wherever an American whim for native food can be anticipated) belie the real difficulty of a diet that includes raw cuttlefish and boiled octopus. Perhaps because they feel that their culture is so integral and complete that it would be hopeless to try to communicate it *all* to an outsider, they are willing to let you in on it piecemeal, with none of the European attitude of: of course you would have to spend a lifetime here to know what we are really like. This oversimplification does a good deal to promote a real understanding: it has the effect of making the curious foreigner want to go deeper, and of making him feel much more at home than he probably is.

The Japanese grasp of American and European culture is remarkable for an

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opposite reason. While recognizing that for us to receive anything Japanese we must make haste slowly, they almost invariably seize on the most complex end-products of our civilization—grand opera, oil painting, New Orleans jazz, high fashion—and expect to achieve by artful imitation what must be approached creatively to succeed at all. Their difficulties and failures in these mediums are not surprising as such: a highly integrated and pervasive culture like the Japanese must be at least as hard to find your way *out of* as *into*. But the fact that they plunge so unwarily into the midst of foreign things, when they are so adept at leading foreigners a step at a time into their own, is paradoxical.

Accordingly, the strangest experiences you are likely to have in Tokyo will have to do not with Japanese customs but with what becomes of American and European customs in their hands. The Fujiwara Opera Company, for instance (whose *Butterfly* had a successful run in New York recently), when compared with our own opera or serious Japanese theater or music, is grotesquely below the standards of either. Their performances during the past season (billed as the 'Twentyth Annual') of *The Barbar* (sic) *of Seville* and *La Traviata* were cut, transposed and re-scored out of all recognition, and you had the feeling that almost nothing of the intended effect of the operas came through for an unfamiliar audience. (An exception was the quality of gay abandon at Flora's soiree in the first scene of *Traviata:* decolletage of the ordinarily concealed Japanese bosom gives an effect of remarkable wantonness.) And yet the company has always been popular, I am told, and presumably is a good introduction to the medium. In my own experience, one of the most valuable introductions to a Japanese institution was just such an ambitious and unwise translation—a very finished and moving production, in English, of the famous Kabuki play about Sugawara, which was given at the University of Hawaii in 1951 under the direction of Earle Ernst, one of the best informed Americans on the Japanese theater.[1] For this season, perhaps we should not pass too abrupt a judgment on any of the Japanese attempts to copy: the copies may in fact achieve the intended effect better than would the originals.

Exhibitions of "European Style Painting" are frequent in museums and department stores. The simplicity which characterizes the best of Japanese art has been abandoned in these paintings in favor of inept and chaotic designs derived mostly from the Post-Impressionists. The canvasses are usually painfully *amateur,* and one is struck by the irony of this, because in their own traditions (of *haiga* painting, for instance, the little brush paintings that accompany *haiku* poetry) which we find so exquisitely controlled, it is considered proper for a painter to demonstrate or even affect an amateur quality. I suppose

[1]Dr. Ernst's work on Kabuki, when it is published, promises to be the best work on the subject, a distinction at present generally accorded to Faubion Bowers' *Japanese Theatre* (Hermitage 1952).

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the answer is, you have to be thoroughly and professionally familiar with a medium before an amateur approach is safe, and then it is only a manner, after all, and not a state of craftsmanship.

The celebrated humor of English signs, advertisements and printed matter generally is in decline here. You will not find a Forgive and Forget Laundry any more, or a burlesque house with the caption "Come In Please And Excite Yourself" on the marquee, as you could a few years ago. But the curious fact remains that in a city where there are many thousands of willing and accessible Americans, the Japanese have a deep-seated reluctance to ask for advice or assistance in the matter of English. This is particularly remarkable, it seems to me, in the field of the arts, where the earnest interest of Americans could not possibly be considered patronizing. The programs of the Kabuki-za Theater, a cultural institution of equal if not precisely comparable prestige to the Metropolitan Opera Company, continue in the present season to print wildly illiterate English synopses. The Kabuki-za has had the enlightened support of a number of Americans since the first days of the Occupation. Most foreigners in the audience rely largely on the English program for an understanding of the plays. Under these conditions, it is pretty astonishing that this (in part) is what they are told with respect to one of the most famous plays in the repertory:

> Having incurred his elder brother Yoritomo's wrath, Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune left the capital, accompanied by his retinue, in order to depend on his friend Hidehira, lord of Oshu province, for help. At a newly-established barrier of Adachi, however, Togashi-Saemon, chief of the guard, barred their way. Thereupon the party had to call themselves itinerant monks with the object of building the Todaiji Temple in South Japan in view, and wished to pass through the barrier. Notwithstanding their excuse, Togashi asked them whether or not they had a subscription list as proof of their identity. Accordingly all the would-be monks seemed to be at a loss, though. Like a quick-witted man that Benkei was, he calmly took a roll out of his luggage, called it a subscription list, and read it aloud as if he had been reading a genuine one. Just then, Togashi lost no time in putting a question concerning the origin and history of the monks to Benkei, who spontaneously answered it. Prudent as Togashi was, therefore, he was impressed favorably by Benkei and apologized to the seemingly monk-like giant for his rudeness of suspecting all the party.

What strikes you about this is not the evidence of the enormous difficulty of translation between our two languages—a difficulty which most Americans accept as simply prohibitive—but the pride which prevents the Japanese here and elsewhere from seeking or accepting assistance, even where, to our eyes, there would seem to be no possible occasion for such pride.

The immediate post-war response, particularly prevalent among young people,

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to discard the discredited Japanese ways and to imitate everything American, seems to be dying out. It is now apparent even to the Japanese that we never offered them anything that they would recognize as a culture, anyway. What we brought with us—universal suffrage, property reforms, milk-shakes—was a collection of isolated culture traits which can be adapted and adopted to taste but do not involve one another with anything like the cohesion of Japanese culture. In comparison with their own traditional, formal and pervasive culture, our ways must seem free and easy to the point of anarchy. It is probably in consideration of this that even the young people seem to have reverted to their own customs, retaining whatever American customs they find congenial. We have relinquished the prestige of conquerors, and our customs must now compete on the open market.

Of the great Japanese institutions, one which has seemed most characteristic and yet most accessible to many foreigners is the popular theater of Japan, Kabuki. Its impact has been as great on theatrically sophisticated people as on the average member of the occupation or security forces. It has recently drawn high praise from Joshua Logan and James A. Michener, and is reported now to be of professional interest to Sol Hurok. If this theatre were taken to the United States, I think it would meet the same spontaneous reception that was recently the lot of the ninety-one art treasures that toured America, because it is essentially as arresting and as international as those works.

To an extent that varies with its conventions, of course, theater can be enjoyed in a language not understood. The conventions of Kabuki are so vigorous and extraverted as to make a word-by-word understanding, if not as superfluous as it is at the circus, at least non-essential, as it is at the opera. The loss to the hearer who doesn't know the language of an opera—especially with certain composers—is very great, and one cannot pretend to exhaust the delights of Kabuki without knowing its language; but for several reasons the plays declare themselves rather fully and easily without a knowledge of Japanese.

One reason is that the element of spectacle is so great. The costumes, which are historical but of a period I can never identify in the melange of traditions, are elaborate and magnificent to the point that a good deal of the business has to do with arranging them, putting them on or taking them off, and on occasions of very long speeches, propping up the wearer of a particularly heavy rig with a stool that is shoved under him by a black-hooded (and hence invisible) attendant. There are formal make-ups, as stylized as masks but naturally more expressive, which declare the character of the wearer, a chalk-white face to indicate noble birth, red lines to indicate bravery or low rank, blue or black lines to denote degrees and varieties of wickedness.

Ingenious use of the revolving stage (which has been a feature of Kabuki for two centuries) and elaborate sets are an important part of the spectacle. An actor can disappear into a trapdoor as a fox, and the same or another actor be shot out as a man, so fast that you are inclined to believe in metamorphosis.

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There are a number of highly fanciful methods of changing scenes, as when a back-fly folds forward towards the audience to present a sloping hillside, or a house revolves to allow a character to pass through a door from one set to another. Perspective is often completed with miniature, three-dimensional landscapes at the back of the set, and on at least one occasion puppet soldiery is marched across such a miniature plain. These stage accomplishments are allowed to interrupt and supplant dramatic interest, and draw from the audience "ah's" which Mr. Mielziner might envy.

Certain unrealistic stage devices are greeted with laughter, notwithstanding that they occur at dramatic moments. There is a scene where a lord beheads a dozen unjust men with a single grand sweep of his sword. Each man throws on the stage a cardboard ball painted to suggest a bloody head, pulls a red cloth over his head, and trots off stage. The laughter that ensues is not derisive of clumsy stage technique, but apparently comes equally from appreciation of a typically Kabuki device and from satisfaction at the denouement. Santha Rama Rau, in her book *East of Home,* reports a discussion she had on this point with Kichiemon, the Kabuki-za's greatest ornament today and I think the finest actor I have ever seen:

> "In the course of conversation about the play I asked Kichiemon if the Japanese audience found the scene in which the man is chopped in half very gruesome to watch. [A cardboard dummy, not at all realistic, is cut in half by a sword and its red inside sections revealed, in *Kajiwara*].
>
> "He looked puzzled and said, 'But it is a comic scene.'
>
> " 'Comic?' I said foolishly.
>
> " 'The prisoner,' he said in a kindly, explanatory way, 'is very comical, and is due to die in any case. Besides, he is a criminal. A *funny* one,' making sure I saw the point.
>
> " 'I see,' I said, not seeing at all."

Apart from the element of spectacle, another quality of Kabuki which helps it communicate to the foreigner is that the acting is essentially both ritualistic and repetitious. Even when a gesture purports to be surreptitious, that fact is demonstrated broadly and often more than once, whereas an open or formal action, like the expression of pleasure at reunion or grief at separation, can go on for some minutes at a time. Evidently the effect of such repetition is cumulative, because it is often towards the end of a prolonged, highly artificial gesture—an old woman's wobbling with age, or a man's grimacing with anger —that the audience confers its complete attention and strange shouts of approval emanate from the galleries. One is told that these shouts, uttered in the bizarre and intense tones of Kabuki speech, are either conventional phrases meaning "That's it" or "I've waited for that", or the names of famous by-gone portrayers of the roles in question, (as though one were to shout "Sarah

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Siddons" at Judith Anderson, perhaps the only tribute her immoderate admirers have not hit upon). These moments are sometimes predicted by the sharp report of wooden clappers off-stage, which calls attention to a dramatic tableau (often familiar for being a reconstruction of a famous woodcut) during which the actors freeze, wide-eyed and in fantastic poses. At other times this heightening of attention and the shouts occur just when the uninitiated onlooker is becoming restless at a repeated gesture with no apparent variation. Probably the effect of such stylized gestures, beautifully executed, is not unlike the power of certain arias which culminate in the final and rather irrational repetitions of word and melody. In any case, the enthusiasm of the audience at such moments is so spontaneous and unanimous as to dispel any impression of apathy that might have been created by the eating, talking and coming and going at other times.

The language of many of the plays is sufficiently archaic to the average Japanese as to present a problem as great as Chaucer's language to us, which means that they themselves rely somewhat on the communication of gesture that a foreigner watches for. The delivery of many of the lines, in a high sing-song falsetto for the feminine roles and in a fustian roar or howl for the bravado male parts, must make the actual words as hard to catch as Wagnerian texts.

Kabuki is traditionally dated from the appearance in Kyoto, in 1586, of an inventive dancing girl named O-Kuni, who claimed to be a temple dancer, the only sort of professional entertainer then allowed. Using a temple bell more or less as a prop, she quickly established a following of limited religious interest, and with the help of a musician and a few assisting actors contrived a story-telling song and dance routine. Her plays were fashioned from four sources: legends of historical figures, contemporary samurai exploits, domestic legends of thwarted love, and the livelier dances of the aristocrats' Noh plays. Although it is always hard to tell where fact and legend part in Japan, and O-Kuni herself is now the stately heroine of a Kabuki play, nevertheless these remain the four principle genres of Kabuki plays today.

The golden age of Kabuki, and one of the great periods of Japanese culture, was the Genroku era and the reigns of the latter Tokugawa Shoguns, about two and half centuries ago. It is a period sometimes compared to the Renaissance, and was characterized by the rise in wealth, though not in influence and power, of merchants and city-dwellers. This group never attained the social position of European burghers, but they did achieve many of the comforts and luxuries of court life. Not allowed to share the Noh plays of their betters, they sponsored the Kabuki with such enthusiasm that the rulers made frequent and determined efforts to suppress it. One effect of this was the flowering of Japan's extraordinary puppet theater at a time when living actors were forbidden to appear on the stage. Chikamatsu (called the Shakespeare of Japan, in another of those depressing epithets) wrote all of his great plays, a mainstay of the

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modern Kabuki, for a puppet theater in Osaka. What is more curious is that the acting of the puppets influenced the style of flesh and blood actors when they returned to the boards. Today many gestures of the head and hands, particularly in the feminine roles, clearly derive from the wobbly movements of the puppets.

Another effect of the official regulation of the theater at this time was the segregation of the sexes and ultimately the banishment of women from the public stage. This has resulted in one of the strangest and most easily misunderstood features of Kabuki, and one which is bound to disturb American audiences accustomed to actresses at least one of whose recommendations is sex-appeal: all the women's roles are portrayed by men. Apart from the great male-actor traditions of the Kabuki, the principle reason this custom survives today is the considerable physical exertion required for the portrayal of these parts. The head-dress alone may weigh twenty-five pounds, although it must be tilted ever so gently, and the brocaded costumes must sometimes be equally heavy. A very strong voice is required to fill the huge house, and the physical strength required to perform the long complex dances is likewise beyond the powers of the average Japanese woman. The skill with which these impersonations are accomplished is such that it is unlikely you would suspect that the players were men if you had not been informed of the fact. Once the play is under way, it requires a conscious effort to bear the fact in mind. That there is no element of abnormality involved in this custom is attested by the respected role accorded in society to members and families of Kabuki companies.

Kabuki plays continued to be written up until the beginning of the present century, and are in fact occasionally added today to the repertory, which consists of about three hundred plays. The plays themselves, or the stories at least, are familiar to most of the audience, which allows the same sort of improvisational treatment that the opera enjoys, where an irrelevant but rewarding scene may be developed at whatever length it seems to merit. The timing, dramatically speaking, is as casual as opera, too. At the end of the famous Sugawara epic, the final scene of which Masefield dramatized as *Pine,* an extremely moving and dramatic scene is allowed to peter out (by western standards only, of course) with an elaborate formal tea ceremony which to the Japanese is apparently a necessary coda.

The acting traditions of this theater are long and proud. There is an interesting system whereby, within a family and within a company, certain titles are bestowed, when and as earned, upon only the greatest actors. At the present time, Utaemon IV, who portrays only feminine roles, and Kichiemon I at the Kabuki-za are considered to be in the greatest tradition. A single attendance at one of their performances is enough to convince most westerners that this is a great tradition, greatly sustained by actors and audience and inviting comparison with the Elizabethan theater.

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*Reviews*

NORTHROP FRYE

# Ministry of Angels[1]

THE SCIENCE OF CRITICISM, as distinct from its art, that is, the shape of criticism as a structure of knowledge, is undeveloped. What follows is Newman's principle, that when a genuine academic subject is not properly defined it creates a vacuum and all its neighbours move in. We have critics assuming that the fundamental principles of criticism are to be found in religion, metaphysics, psychology or social studies, but not many who are willing to find them in criticism itself. Such an attempt would return us to Arnold's conception of "culture", which is really the conception of criticism as the central division of the humanities, flanked by history and philosophy. (Literature and the other arts are, like nature, a *field* of knowledge, not subjects of study but objects of study.)

But developing a science of criticism would not do everything. Berdyaev begins one of his books by pointing out how anxious society is to make the philosopher do something more obviously useful than philosophizing. It is the same in history: there the way to attract attention is to be a determinist. We get determinism whenever a writer with a special interest, say in geography or economics or religion, expresses that interest by the rhetorical device of putting his favorite study into a causal relationship with whatever interests him less. Such a method gives one the feeling of explaining one's subject while one is studying it, thus wasting no time. Criticism today is largely occupied by determinisms of this sort.

Mr. Allen Tate is a religious determinist, and apart from his intellectual honesty (he constantly makes a point of giving his own case away), a very astute one. If the reader is a little jaded with the taste of dogmatic tabasco sauce on modern literature, he will have no relief here: he gets a familiar mouthful on the opening page: "The saints tell us that confident expectancy of damnation is a more insidious form of spiritual pride than certainty of salvation." But Mr. Tate continually refers to his prejudices, and the modern liberal's attempt to escape from prejudice is nailed into its coffin with three resounding whacks: it is private, mantic and wilful. Normally, a prejudice in the mind is a major premise which is mostly submerged, like an iceberg. Mr.

[1]THE FORLORN DEMON: Didactic and Critical Essays, by *Allen Tate*. Regnery. $3.00. THE TRUE VOICE OF FEELING: Studies in English Romantic Poetry, by *Herbert Read*. Pantheon. $4.00. DANTE'S DRAMA OF THE MIND. A Modern Reading of the *Purgatorio*, by *Francis Fergusson*. Princeton University Press. $4.00.

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Tate's explicit prejudice is more like a loadstone mountain or a siren's island, and is for a view of man which co-ordinates and limits the faculties of intellect and feeling. Such a view he finds in Catholic Christianity, particularly in the period before Descartes introduced the dualism of the "angel in the machine"; a dualism which splits man into a pure but proud intellect trying to know essences directly, like an angel, and an autonomous feeling trying to gain an equally direct possession of experience. Dante is thus at one poetic pole of Mr. Tate's critical system; at the other is Poe, the "forlorn demon" of the title, in whom both aspects of the Cartesian dualism coalesce.

With one exception (a rather irresponsible discussion of "Is Literary Criticism Possible?"), the essays in his book are excellent. Few critics can write with more sustained brilliance or employ the technical language of criticism with more assurance and dexterity. The incompetent critic has a delicate instinct for avoiding the centre of his subject; Mr. Tate has an infallible instinct for finding it. In discussing Poe he goes straight for *Eureka* and the "colloquies", and relates the speculative nihilism in them with the more obvious nihilism in the Usher story. In discussing Johnson he puts his finger at once on Johnson's lack of sense for the dramatic or experiential aspect of literature. Even when his dialectic seems merely ingenious, it still has the brain-softening plausibility that we used to find in the best Marxist criticism. There is no question of finding in Mr. Tate himself what he calls the pride that prevents the complete discovery of the subject. Nothing is actually obscured: I get rather a sense of a wrenched and astigmatic intensity of vision. The astigmatism is due to what he calls "an ambitious assumption, about the period in which we live, which I shall not make explicit." There is an uneasy feeling of unwritten thus-we-see perorations hovering around the conclusions of his essays.

I call Mr. Tate a determinist because he says and assumes that literary standards, "in order to be effectively literary, must be more than literary." That is, they have ultimately to be religious. The theme of his essay on "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" is that the profoundest view of the man of letters is to take him as a lay preacher, revealing the apocalyptic dimensions of the contemporary scene. "There would be no hell for modern man if our men of letters were not calling attention to it." This determinism is then projected historically as the Great Western Butterslide, the doctrine of a co-ordinated synthesis in medieval culture giving place, at the Renaissance, to a splitting and specializing schizophrenia which has got steadily worse until it has finally landed us all in that Pretty Pass in which we are today. His pages are strewn with such remarks as "a society which has once been religious cannot . . . secularize itself", or "there is no end, yet in sight, to the fragmenting of the western mind", or "the city of Augustine and Dante, where it was possible for men to find . . . the analogue to the City of God" ("still visible", faintly, in eighteenth-century America).

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In this theory the Middle Ages becomes, like the moon in Ariosto, a vast repository of all cultural acquisitions which we have since lost. It has a miraculous supply of everything that we need in our time. For such an Eden we ought to have, somewhere in the Renaissance, a forbidden tree, or at least an ideological clothes-horse on which to tie the fatal apple. This lay figure used to be Bacon, now it is Descartes, or, in more esoteric circles, Ramus. (Mr. Tate, who doesn't miss much, says: "The demonology which attributes to a few persons the calamities of mankind is perhaps a necessary convention of economy in discourse." It seems to me necessary only for a deterministic organization of values.) We also need a type of argument that exaggerates to the limit the social and ethical consequences of contemporary beliefs, while taking an almost perversely intellectualized view of medieval beliefs. Dante told Can Grande that the aim of his whole poem was practical and moral, which means that his primary purpose in writing the *Inferno* was to scare the pants off his reader. This need not affect our appreciation of Dante, for we take his realities for fictions, just as we take our own fictions for realities. Still, a modern reader might well find Dante's motivation, in itself, quite as repulsive as the motivation of Berenice's lover returning from her body with a greatly relieved mind and a fine set of teeth. But Dante has receded into a purely aesthetic distance; Poe, says Mr. Tate, is "our cousin", but Dante's cousins have all disappeared into the Wonderful Synthesis.

It takes a genuine effort, usually accompanied by a genuine annoyance, to realize that the Great Western Butterslide is a myth, like the Golden Age or the Social Contract. Suppose it were examined as a problem within criticism, and not used as a grindstone for an extra-critical axe. I think that then, as we studied medieval, Renaissance, Baroque and later cultures impartially, suspending our value-judgements, we should find ourselves revolving around the simple fact that one follows another in time. We should discover, in short, a process of cultural aging, and we should come to think of Western culture as having become, not better or worse or less unified, but simply older. And while aging may be reacted to emotionally as the working of a cruel fate or as a progressive deterioration or as a breakdown caused by a loss of innocence, all these are immature views.

The trouble is that the best statement of the problem of cultural aging is in Spengler, and nobody wants Spengler's maudlin hero-cult, his conscientious Philistinism, or the gloomy Wagnerian whinnies in his sound effects about the dark goings-on of nature and destiny. Still, value-judgements founded on a theory of cultural aging, including Spengler's own, are more or less addled versions of Spengler; and if we are all Spenglerians today, we may as well be clear-sighted ones. From this point of view, trying to find everything we have "since lost" in the Middle Ages is another way of looking for the fountain of youth. But, as Samuel Butler says in *Erewhon*, there is no way of making an

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aged art young again; it has to work out its own salvation in fear and trembling. Fear and trembling is at least one thing that we can find in Poe. I imagine that Mr. Tate would concede most of this, because he does not need the historical projection of his argument at all: his real aim is to set the Church against the world in a present confrontation. That would still make him a determinist, but a much more difficult one to refute.

Sir Herbert Read deals with the romantic poets and their tradition. He is also a determinist, though a gentler one than Mr. Tate—a psychological determinist this time, with latent political implications. He finds the basis of Romanticism in Schelling's conception of art as the conscious recreation of what appears in nature as organic form. Such a conception immediately drives a wedge between the real thing in art, the living and integrated organism, and the dead artefact. One is a form, the other a superinduced shape. The latter owes its existence to the notion of art as artifice, of poetry as a rhetorical playing with words. The essential feature of dead poetry is predictability, or mechanical regularity. Living poetry is unpredictable, hence irregular, and is the "true voice of feeling"—a phrase quoted from Keats. Wordsworth and Coleridge brought in the "cult of sincerity", of never being satisfied with anything less than the true voice of feeling, and their tradition was continued by Keats, Hopkins, Pound, Eliot and others, all of whom are dealt with in separate essays. The real tradition is contrasted with its pinchbeck imitation in Whitman and Lawrence, where there is more talk about sincerity than practice of it. Here the irregular rhythm is not organic, and so in Whitman it is constantly collapsing into a facile Biblical parallelism. (Incidentally, it is a little insular for Sir Herbert to remark that Whitman has had no disciples except Lawrence and Edmund Carpenter.)

Romanticism in poetry is thus an attempt, not to know essences like Mr. Tate's angels, but to create them, or rather to liberate them. To express the true voice of feeling is in fact one of the central liberating processes of human life, and it arises as part of our heritage of freedom, in opposition to the Classical view of a prefabricated nature and an art which is merely "a grace added to life: a plaything". (Before long we meet the inevitable unhappy footnote saying that of course in these terms a great deal of Racine is really Romantic, and a great deal of Wordsworth Classical.) In true poetry, the poet and the man must be united in a state of psychological purity, for "all great poetry, as Keats realized, is born of a certain modesty and simplicity of heart". Through all his sensitive criticism and his very real erudition, Sir Herbert carries a most disarming simplicity of heart himself.

His main theme is essentially the same as the problem of *ecstasis* or "transport" in Longinus, very ably handled in one of Mr. Tate's essays. The problem is to locate the point at which rhetoric passes into poetry; persuasion, stimulus

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and suggestion into the recognition of the true voice of feeling, of what the cult of sincerity produces. Sir Herbert is not careful to distinguish personal from literary sincerity, or to keep in mind the principle that with the poet, as with Machiavelli's prince, the reality of such virtues is irrelevant: the simulation of them is everything. But then he attaches great importance to the biography of the poet, psychologically interpreted. There is a curious argument in his essay "In Defence of Shelley", to the effect that Shelley was a narcist suffering from hallucinations, which makes him abnormal, and consequently valuable to us, as the normal is so dull. There is much more said about Shelley's thought than his poetry, perhaps because there is undoubtedly a good deal of rhetorical playing with words in Shelley. Surely it would be equally possible to argue the question of sincerity the opposite way. In some Elizabethan lyrics, for instance Campion's "When thou must home", it seems to me that it is the completely conventional nature of theme, structure and technique that sets free the true voice of feeling. There is no organic place for pre-Romantic poetry in Sir Herbert's book: he merely says: "I assume that in so far as the poetry of the past is sincere, to that extent it is organic in form." So two themes are mixed together, one the creative process itself, the other the manifestation of that process in the Romantic movement.

Now, once more, suppose Sir Herbert's subject were approached from within criticism, instead of being externally determined by the psychological principle of sincerity. If we take a line of Shakespeare at random:

*Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;*

we can see at least three main rhythms in it. One is the running rhythm, the ten syllables of the iambic pentameter; another, more important for this line, is the semantic or prose rhythm. There is also a soliloquizing, oracular rhythm, turning meditatively on its axis around its sound-pattern:

*Ay;*
*but to die . . .*
*and go*
*we know*
*not where . . .*

This, we may say, is the "poetic" rhythm as distinct from the "verse" rhythm, and it is essentially irregular and discontinuous, in contrast to running rhythm, which can go on indefinitely.

The main technical experiments in the 16th and 17th centuries were with running rhythm, and established blank verse, various stanza-forms and later the couplet. Prose was still a half-metrical rhetoric. From the "Senecan amble" on, a series of technical experiments in prose, carried through mainly by Dryden, Addison and Swift, set free the distinctive semantic rhythm of prose. Then, with the later eighteenth century, there begins a series of technical experiments designed similarly to set free the distinctive "poetic" or sound-

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pattern rhythm. Long poems were still written in running rhythm, but no new running rhythms were established, except the ones that ran too fast, like the anapests of Swinburne. In short, the technical discoveries of the last century or so, including Hopkins' sprung rhythm and *vers libre,* are best seen as discoveries within a genre. Such a view would logically account for a poet who merely baffles Sir Herbert—Byron, who, realizing that the perfection of running rhythm in Pope was a dead end, relapsed into a *knittelvers* which is also a parody of the conventions of running rhythm. It would also give central importance to Poe, whom Sir Herbert ignores, and Poe's theory that poetry is essentially discontinuous sound-pattern. In this way we could separate the technical problem, confined to one genre and one historical period, from the larger implications of the creative process, and so the former would not become merely a loose allegory of the latter.

Mr. Fergusson's book on the *Purgatorio* appears not to be deterministic. Surely a book on Dante could not entirely forgo the vision of modern man coming out of the Middle Ages with everything in his pockets and dropping it all on the way, like Hansel and Gretel. Ah, yes: "I suppose it was in the 17th century . . . that . . . the *lumen naturale* of the Middle Ages was finally lost." But this is rare in his book, and he also avoids, more by instinctive good taste than by design, the graduate-school clichés about the *Commedia* as Thomism set to music. The result is that he has written a charming and eloquent book on the *Purgatorio.* It is primarily a teacher's book. Dante's poetry, like Bach's music, adopts bewilderingly complex means in order to produce an effect of massive simplicity, and Mr. Fergusson has concentrated on the simplicity. He adopts Dante's "the exposition of the letter is nought else than the development of the form" as an axiom, and so his form does not emancipate itself from being a running commentary.

Some things thereby are necessarily lost: the treatment of recurring symbols, for instance, such as the sirens and especially the mirror, the subject of Mr. Tate's Dante essay. And perhaps we are referred a bit too often to the excellent notes in the Temple Classics edition for the details of the allegory. We get little sense of the incredible skill of Dante's allegorical counterpoint as it rumbles through the great stretto of the closing cantos, at every tercet taking our breath away with its ingenuity, yet inevitably right, and never manipulated. Mr. Fergusson does however catch the sense of suppressed excitement that we feel in these cantos: here we are in the centre of the *Commedia,* and therefore at the centre of our whole literary experience, and so the memory of other things near the centre, late plays of Shakespeare and Sophocles, the Bible, some moments in Plato and in modern poetry, crowd into our minds, and we glimpse a mass of converging rays of significance, as though there were one great thing that the whole of literature had to say to us.

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It is a self-effacing book, patiently linking Dante, as a teacher should, both with the "great tradition" coming down from Aristotle and with contemporary thought and his reader's own experience. He is content to throw out some of his most illuminating remarks parenthetically, almost apologetically, as when he says that Dante's "will" is closer to what we mean by "libido" than it is to our rationalized conception of will. He shows unobtrusively how Dante, not knowing Greek drama, was still able to pick the essence of the "Dionysiac" out of a couple of bad lines in Lucan, which to me implies that the real "great tradition" is not a curriculum but a habit of imaginative reading. He follows with great clarity and skill the central process of freeing the will through a series of progressive rebirths, until the pilgrim reaches the original unfallen childhood of the Golden Age. He shows how the pilgrim's climb is at once an effort of will and an effort to relax the will, like the creative process itself, a purification of everything that obscures the free creative spirit, until, as the pilgrim enters the innocent world on top of the mountain, he becomes one with the poet who watches him. Thus—and this I think is the distinctive feature of Mr. Fergusson's exposition—one of Dante's themes is the liberation of his own liberal art of poetry.

Mr. Fergusson shows, I think correctly, that the *Purgatorio* illustrates in its development a progression up Dante's four levels of meaning. (Incomprehensibly he inverts the second and third levels, contradicting Dante's express statements and the whole medieval tradition. I am not interested in his reasons: I think he has simply made a mistake, one that has to be corrected by the reader before his argument comes into focus.) The crisis of the *Purgatorio,* then, would be the passage from the allegorical (*quid credas*) to the moral (*quid agas*) as Dante passes from invisibly directed penance to the direct vision of the Word of God. As he goes through the ring of fire he passes Kierkegaard's "either-or" dilemma, leaving his "aesthetic" dalliance with Casella far behind and moving into the sphere of ethical freedom, in the moment that the poet and the pilgrim begin to become the same man.

The relation of *quid credas* to *quid agas* is the centre of the *Purgatorio,* and therefore of Mr. Fergusson's book. It is also the central theme of Mr. Tate, especially in his opening essay on the relation of communication to communion. It is also in a way the central theme of *The True Voice of Feeling,* which turns on a parallel distinction of external and internal creation. Sir Herbert is, naturally, bothered by Kierkegaard's identification of freedom with an ethical activity which rejects the aesthetic. He writes two essays proving that Wordsworth and Coleridge were early existentialists, which is hardly much of a point, though the essays are interesting enough. But Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" attitude is that of the detached spectator, not the artist: Galileo's view of man as a spectator of nature makes science equally a part of Bacon's "idol of the theatre". The "either-or" is between two mental attitudes, not two subjects.

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One attitude says "this is", and contemplates whatever it is; the other says "let this be", and acts creatively. At the end of the *Purgatorio,* Dante is approaching (the *quo tendas* of anagogy) the presence of a God, who, when incarnate in man, spoke in parables rather than propositions, and taught, not a system to be admired, but aphorisms to be recreated in action. Hence Dante does not renounce but emancipates his creative and poetic powers, for "let this be" is the axiom of the poet's craft as well. Dante thus claims for his poetry, as Mr. Fergusson says, an authority which cannot be overruled by any other aspect of human activity. Like Mr. Tate, I think it very unlikely that Dante is predicting his personal salvation at the end of the *Paradiso,* but that he is asserting the salvation of the poetic vision I have no doubt. And that is why I feel that the critic, who follows the poet with a confidence in direct proportion to the poet's greatness, need not look for his guiding principles in any more authoritative field than his own.

R. W. FLINT

# The Domesticated Curse[1]

GOETHE NOT ONLY STANDS AT the fountainhead of modern German literature, he *is* the fountainhead of modern German literature. Like George Washington, he had the luck and the virtue to do what most of the other revolutionaries only dreamt or talked about, all of which gives him an unearthly authority extremely intimidating to critics. On the one hand, it invites the wild adulation of the average Germanist; on the other, it invites such casual, incredulous and (one must add) wrongheaded judgments as T. S. Eliot's remark that Goethe tried too much to succeed at any one thing. A century after his death, Goethe remains an overpowering figure, a constant source of fresh oracles and valid iconoclasms, a writer, nurtured by and nurturing a nation of protestant theorists, who still provides our most dramatic example of how the work of art is more real, more compelling, more various than any critical formulae which attempt to pin it down. This is doubtless what Santayana meant in his superb essay on *Faust* when he wrote that "the incidental philosophy or philosophies of Goethe's *Faust* are, to my mind, often better than its ultimate philosophy." Santayana makes it clear that when he speaks of "incidental philosophy" he means the way in which the realized life of the poem goes well beyond mere illustration of any total meaning that Goethe may have intended to give it.

[1]THE DISINHERITED MIND, by *Erich Heller.* Dufour and Saifer. $3.50. DOKTOR FAUST: *A Dance Poem,* by *Heinrich Heine.* British Book Centre. $2.50. FROM THE REMAINS OF COUNT C. W., by *Rainer Maria Rilke,* introduction and translation by *J. B. Leishman.* British Book Centre. $2.00.

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In German literature, certainly, Goethe is the great "explosion" which threw literature into a new world of improvizing intuition, forcing criticism to revise its methods. If the creative impulse which Goethe initiated is now all but exhausted, criticism itself has at last had time to catch up and discover that it is not, after all, entirely helpless in the face of his daemon.

That it has never been *entirely* helpless we know from such evidence as Heine's ballet *Doktor Faust,* as well as from scattered remarks of such outlanders as Melville, Santayana and Gide. Mr. Heller's excellent study of certain representative modern Germans—Nietzsche, Burckhardt, Spengler, Kafka, Rilke and Karl Kraus—in the light of Goethe's theories and achievement, is the first book in English to rise to the height of its subject. Not only is it comparable in penetration and comprehensiveness to Martin Turnell on the French, it is also quite often witty, though not quite comparable in this regard to Eliot. There is a slight residuum of Germanizing rhetoric and a certain penchant for honest gloom, but these are only mild shadows on a highly lucid surface and probably inevitable in any serious treatment of this hypergloomy epoch. In handling a subject which has begotten so much turgid writing, Mr. Heller is neither turgid nor plaintive.

"What was the nature of the experience in the face of which Goethe seemed to offer no help? It was the very kind of experience before which Goethe himself had always proved helpless: the exposure to the manifestations of evil and sin. 'The mere attempt to write tragedy might be my undoing,' he once said, and it was the truth—at least for the greatest part of his life. . . . Anyone who has ever come under the spell of Goethe's *Iphigenie* knows its power to persuade, to convince and to move. There seems to be no doubt that it is poetically true. But which aspect of poetic truth do we mean? The same that applies to *Antigone* or *King Lear?* No, certainly not. *Iphigenie* is lyrically, but not dramatically true, which is as much as to say that it has the truth of a vision of what life and the world could be if they corresponded to what is best in a great and good soul. It is dramatically untrue because the objective world which is the scene of the play is not real enough to offer serious resistance to the realization of that vision. In other words, there is no real evil in that world . . . an incongruity between the radicalism with which the moral problem is posed, and the certainly lovable gentleness of the spiritual nature which has to carry it." Here is the nub of the Goethean problem. Mr. Heller wastes no time juggling categories, but assumes, as he ought, a general agreement about the meaning of "evil" and "tragedy". His real interest lies elsewhere, not in labelling Goethe, but in discovering how he subordinated everything to the lyric ideal, so that his work could have a rich Shakespearian expressive range without departing from the genius of a language whose roots lie in the minnesong, the folksong, the hymn and the bardic tale. When he goes on to note Goethe's "unsophisticated taste for rather dull drawings, his 'classical' preoccupation with

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the most uninspired examples of Roman sculpture, his preferring Zelter's music to Beethoven's, and, above all, his all but philistine pedantry . . ." he is echoing the complaints of Melville in a letter to Hawthorne of 1851: "As with all great genius, there is an immense deal of flummery in Goethe, and in proportion to my own contact with him, a monstrous deal of it in me." You can take this reappearance of a radical judgement of Goethe in Mr. Heller as a twin contagion; from France by way of whatever elements of the Catholic depth-seeking tradition T.S. Eliot absorbed from Baudelaire, Maurras, etc., and from Eliot's own roots in the New England mind which formed Melville and to a lesser extent Santayana. For if the "silent center" of Mr. Heller's book is Hölderlin, as he claims in his Preface, the critical engine in the background is usually Eliot. As another worthy example of the "American revolution" in modern European criticism, he can be said to close the conspicuous gap in critical theory between the spirit of Goethe and the spirit of Eliot, between a "romantic" sense of life in its lyric dimension and the traditionalist's sense of achieved spiritual form.

Mr. Heller is one of the rare critics who not only knows that Goethe abounded in negative capability to the end of his life—that he added the "explanatory" prologue to Faust more as a sop to Schiller than as an explanation of anything, that he never ceased viewing his own time as one of chaos and irreconcilable philosophic conflict, that he often had thought of abandoning poetry altogether, that in the *Xenien* he mercilessly satirizes the kind of smugness of which critics have often accused him—but also knows the extent to which his pedantic dilletantism was little more than a strategy for undermining the smug sciences with their own weapons. Far from a universal man in the style of Leonardo, Goethe was wholly a literary man and wholly dedicated to leaving behind him irrefutable witness to Aristotle's belief that poetry is more reliable than "history". That he failed in detail, in the physical and natural sciences, sometimes ludicrously so, only dramatizes the collapse of the early-Renaissance ideal in the completeness of Goethe's surrender to "art". After Goethe negative capability was to run riot in Germany, to institutionalize itself in Nietzsche, who failed as a poet precisely because he couldn't maintain Goethe's balance, and to reach its final domestication in what Mr. Heller calls the "negative transcendence" of Kafka, a world which in a smaller way matches Goethe's own in its coolly radiant harmony.

It was immensely to Heine's credit to have understood both Goethe's greatness and his weakness when nobody else in Germany did. His newly-published ballet-extravaganza, *Doktor Faust*, was written in Paris at the midpoint of his tragic bout with syphilis at the request of a London theatre manager. As in most of Heine's works, one must look for the joker amidst the jokes. (No joke at England's expense would have been too elaborate for Heine.) It calls for five sumptuous sets, an immense corps de ballet, countless changes of costume, a

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perpetual riding to and fro on winged horses, bats and swans, the sprouting of antlers from the head of an onstage dancer, the brief emergence from the floor of a flaming tiger, etc. etc. Without these effects, which would have taxed the theatre of *The Indian Queen,* the ballet would be hopelessly emasculated. As Heine himself wrote, it is "a ballet in form only." The clue to this odd *jeu d'esprit* lies elsewhere, I think, than in Heine's desire to write a ballet which he would never in any case have been able to see performed. He had been fond of telling the story of his one meeting with Goethe, during which the great man had asked the unknown young poet what he was writing at the moment, and Heine had replied that he was composing a *Faust.* In this first English edition of the work, the introductory letter which Heine wrote to the London manager is longer by several pages than the scenario itself, and in it, with the full force of his wit and experience, he gets down to a critique of the Goethean masterpiece. "I have, at least, tried to deserve one creditable mark which Goethe could not boast of earning: in his *Faust* one cannot help but notice a complete nothing more or less than a profound religious piety, a condition of soul which lack of concern for the true spirit of the ancient legend. This inner spirit was Goethe, that glorious old sceptic, could never hope to understand. In this respect, however, he was guilty of an arbitrary licence which surely must be condemned aesthetically, and which finally revenged itself on the poet's work. . . . His *Faust* has always lacked a feeling of completeness, indeed it never *was* completed unless one is prepared to accept the puerile second part (written forty years later) as a true fulfillment." Heine goes on to review the Faust legend in its German versions, giving fair credit to "that Elizabethan masterpiece", Marlowe's *Faustus,* "the prototype from which our modern Faust emerged." The second part of Goethe's play, however, is very far from Goethe in terms of *Sturm und Drang* and youthful *Existenz.* The Heine Faust "puerile". Heine's impatience is akin to Ortega's short-sighted reading of no longer has the Renaissance amenity of even the Marlowe Faustus; he is modern in his explicit taste for corruption, quite medieval in his conscience and fate. The ballet is therefore a period piece, a parody rather than a direct lyric summary of any one ethos. Heine, the boulevardier and friend of Gérard de Nerval, kept his scenario in tune with the 19th century theatre by shrinking Marlowe's fairly austere spiritual drama into a struggle between purity and concupiscence, respectability and sex, with sex ascendant. The witches' revel of the Third Act emits a powerful goatish whiff, at once too strong and too banal for any but the inner eye of contemplation. So much, Heine must have gloated, for the British.

As closet-drama, Heine's ballet stands halfway between Goethe's negative understanding of himself, his deliberate avoidance of tragedy and his refusal to knuckle under to Schiller's demand for more philosophy, and Mr. Heller's theoretic understanding in the reflected light of later writers. Mr. Heller takes the

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most careful pains, therefore, to point out that each of the later figures was great precisely in his superior grasp of what Goethe meant by poetic *Anschauung*. Even Spengler, whom he doesn't hesitate to call "wicked" for his callow militarism, invokes and pretty well adheres to the Goethean ideal of historiography —"sympathy, observation, comparison, immediate and inward certainty, intellectual *flair*". The poet who wrote, "Alles Vergängliche/ Ist nur ein Gleichnis" at the end of his life's work is without doubt the father of German symbolism and the greatest positive defendant of poetic *Anschauung* in the modern world.

How *could* the later writers sustain Goethe's view of life as essentially a lyric poem in a dramatic setting—*Ihr glücklichen Augen,/ Was je ihr gesehn,/ Es sei wie es wolle,/ Es war doch so schön!*—and yet do justice to what they saw happening around them? Mr. Heller provides his clearest answer in the chapter on Kafka. That classical sense of an active external malignancy, a radical evil, a 'divine' wrath, of which Melville was so frantically and sometimes tediously aware in his letters to Hawthorne, reentered German writing as a personage in its own right. "Ein jeder Engle ist schrecklich. . ." as Rilke begins the first Duino Elegy: every divine power is destructive as well as redeeming. Mr. Heller finds the weakness of Burckhardt and Nietzsche in their failure to give this dark power the place by the hearth it has in Kafka and Rilke. Burckhardt had radical honesty, toughmindedness and a poet's view of history, but also a professional obligation not to probe certain depths. Nietzsche sacrificed his poetic instincts to philosophy and prophecy.

Mr. Heller's writing on Kafka, buttressed by a careful account of the line of descent from Goethe (he might have noted how Kafka paid his typically oblique homage to the Sage of Weimar when he ensconced himself in the Frauenplan by courting the housekeeper's daughter), is rivalled, I think, only by the Gide-Barrault pantomime as a critical reflection on this great writer. It is not a literary analysis—Mr. Heller is not yet a close critic of literature—but neither does it belie the literary facts, and it very nicely cuts the ground from under both the over-appreciation of Edwin Muir and the under-appreciation of Edmund Wilson. Trained as we are to look to *Lear* for our model of negative capability, a play whose mordancy is intuitive rather than systematic, legendary rather than everyday, superhuman rather than mundane, English and American critics have mistaken Kafka's initial convention for his whole substance, the form for the nature. Where *is* Nature in Kafka, the critics have asked, where is the good sex of Tolstoy and Lawrence, the peace of a reconciled Lear?

Mr. Heller believes, and rightly I think, that along with the boyishness, the diffidence and the desiccation, they are there in sublimated but quite enjoyable form. In Kafka the dark power, which Mr. Heller calls the Curse, has become the sustaining, unspoken but pervasive, spiritual assumption, not a theory *about* life but life itself. "Thus Kafka's work, as much as Nietzsche's, must remain a

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stumbling-block to the analyzing interpreter to whom, in the enlightened atmosphere of modern Europe, the word 'curse' comes only as a faint memory of Greek tragedy, or as a figurative term for a combination of ill-luck and psychological maladjustment. Yet the grey world of Kafka's novels is luminous with its fire. . . . And although Mr. Muir is right in saying that Kafka's novels are about life in the grip of a power 'which all religions have acknowledged', this power is certainly not 'divine law and divine grace', but rather one which, having rebelled against the first and fallen from the second, has, in its own domain, successfully contrived the suspension of both." If this is not a definitive formula, it is certainly a long step in the right direction. It accounts very well for the fact that Kafka's art is symbolic rather than allegorical, that it creates its lyric 'truth' out of the dynamic meeting of a tired culture and a radically innocent and harmonious sensibility.

Except as a theorist about poetry and life, Rilke somewhat eludes Mr. Heller, which is not to say that Mr. Heller misses his genius, but only that a further effort of literary analysis is required. His lengthy battle with Eliot's notion that a poet only 'uses' the thought of a philosopher seems to be one of those belated back-eddies of criticism. "Mr. Eliot suggests that Shakespeare, in making Hamlet think in the manner of Montaigne, did not think himself, but merely 'used' thought for dramatic ends. This sounds true enough, and would be even truer if it were possible to 'use' thought without thinking in the process of using it." But so much is understood in any respectable theory of the imagination and has been often said of Yeats, like Rilke a 'provincial' poet who wove himself a fine metaphysical web to support his verse.

*From the Remains of Count C. W.*, a collection of minor poems written during the composition of the *Duino Elegies* and given a facetious title to keep them apart from his major interest, now published for the first time in an English edition with translations by J. B. Leishman, is a welcome addition to the canon. Many of them are charming, showing a return to the naive lyricism of the early poems which makes fresh use of his special mixture of abstraction and exact imagry. Some are among his best, notably a long meditation on Karnak which Rilke considered a "very fine Egyptian poem."

To support Mr. Heller's belief in the rigor of Rilke's mind, we might examine Mr. Leishman's translation of one of the best of these lyrics.

*Schöne Aglaja, Freundin meiner Gefühle,*
*unser Frohsein erreichte den Lerchenschlag*
*oben im Morgen. Lass uns nicht fürchten die Kühle*
*abends nach unserm Sommertag.*

*Kurve der Liebe, lass sie uns zeichnen. Ihr Steigen*
*Soll uns unendlich rühmlich sein.*

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*Aber auch später, wenn sie sich neigt—: wie eigen.*
*Wie deine feine Braue so rein.*

* * *

*Chosen friend of my feelings, lovely Aglaia,*
*our joyousness reached to where morning skylarks sing.*
*Let us not, when our summer day shall expire,*
*fear the coolness of evening.*

*Love's curve, let it starrily sketch us! Its rise, what share*
*Of glory for both of us that will be!*
*Later, though, too, when it sinks—how beyond compare!*
*Like your delicate brows in its purity.*

Mr. Leishman's first stanza is well enough, but in the second he collapses. "Starrily" is one of those poetical words Rilke would never have used unless it advanced the metaphor, probably not even then, and nothing to suggest it here. "What share of glory for both of us that will be!" is bathetic enough. But his least pardonable lapse, in this poem of 8 lines, is to transform the sober "eigen"—unique, special-case—into the vapid "how beyond compare!", when it is precisely the odd comparison between Aglaia's eyebrows and the curve of love that Rilke is insisting upon, and not that the two are incomparable in some perfunctory way. To be fair to Mr. Leishman, not all his translations are as bad as this, but it illustrates the tendency of apologists for Rilke to throw him cutely back into *Sturm und Drang* where he doesn't belong.

One returns assentingly, therefore, to Mr. Heller's faith in the power of the modern Germans to remain true to Goethe's radical commitmnt to poetry and the power of the symbol, to preserve a lyricism which is fresh without diffuseness and a vision capable of renewing the world.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

# Not Quite a Renaissance

THE VICTORIAN SAGE, by *John Holloway*. St. Martin's Press. $3.75.

THE QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN after a reading of Mr. Holloway's meticulous, exasperating book are the ones he seems most candidly to have answered, or at least been always on the verge of answering. How original and useful is his method, borrowing as it professedly does from logic, semantics, metaphysics, ethics, fashionable analytic and unfashionable discursive literary criticism? What account does he take of medium, and how does he justify his intimate association, beyond medium, of two social critics (Carlyle and Arnold), one polemical theologian (Newman), and three novelists (Disraeli, Eliot, and Hardy)? Even if we accept the author's definition of the "sage", how do these qualify as the Victorian exemplars and whom, therefore, do they outrank and exclude?

The author's general aim is ambitious and praiseworthy: to demonstrate from the writings of his sages the substance of his claim for them; to trace and describe wisdom in its verbal modes of operation. The questions arise as soon as he moves into particulars.

Mr. Holloway distinguishes the activities of the sage as being at the same time speculative, moral, and artistic: presenting an ordered and comprehensive "view of life", which, though "not . . . wholly about experience", yet finds "an adequate sanction in experience"; irreducible, without loss of all force and interest, to "the bald epitomes of literary histories", and so intrinsic to the very words of the sage; in fact, "quickening the reader to a new capacity for experience" by working "in the mode of the artist in words". "A very important point," Mr. Holloway warns us, "is that we are not studying techniques of *persuasion*", *i.e.*, those which merely increase the "reader's credulity in a quite general way"; "the methods traced here persuade because they clarify, and clarify because they are organic to a view presented . . . by the whole weave of a book. . . . Ideally, to marshal the details of the matter one must draw on what both the philosopher and the literary critic know about language; and to grasp the integration of these details in complete books one must have a critic's sense of how the parts of a book unite in what is not a logical unity." And, finally, though "this enquiry" is closely related to "literary criticism of the more usual kind", "its materials are not the familiar stock-in-trade of critics, exactly because the problem does lie in tracing how this distinctive kind of writing comes to possess a non-logical unity and compulsion like that of art in words."

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Whatever stock-in-trade of literary criticism Mr. Holloway is contrasting to his own, we have no means of knowing: he never tells us, and all of his own materials—tone, theme, metaphor, analogy, image-pattern, paradox and every other mode of compressed argument, reanimation of moral commonplace, "control of meaning" by a quasi-philological invention or renovation of words —all these have been the familiar stock-in-trade of literary criticism for at least thirty years. Nor do we ever discover, in the course of the book, what the philosopher knows about language that the literary critic has not known and been using since, say, Aristotle. If Mr. Holloway were concerned simply with discriminating several kinds of intellectual activity (which may, and very often do, coöperate in critical practice), there would be no difficulty. But he is not: he is insisting on the originality and eclecticism of his method in order to persuade us of the uniqueness and synthesizing power of his work; and this technique of persuasion is, in the author's excellent words, one which does not clarify, but merely increases the reader's credulity in a quite general way.

It is, besides, not clear how the activities of the sage, as Mr. Holloway distinguishes them, differ in any respect from (except as they are inferior instances of) the activities of the novelist, or of the dramatic or epic poet, or, indeed, of any other "artist in words". It is very doubtful that as solid a claim may be made—certainly, the author never makes it—for the sage as for any major novelist or poet, on the ability to invent and develop, out of experience, a large and inclusive view of life: a metaphysical, moral, substantial, and unaccidental structure; irreducible and unique. Mr. Holloway's sage, yearning to tell somebody something, comes to seem a novelist with a theme and no subject.

If Mr. Holloway's method is neither original nor daringly eclectic, if he fails to show how it will assist him in describing a valuable kind of intellectual activity distinct from that of the literary artist, if he even suggests by default that the kind of activity he wishes to single out takes place within, and is conditioned by, an abortive literary form, we still, perhaps, have the prospect of a critical evaluation of influential writings that (we may here agree with the author) have seldom or never before been examined with close critical attention. But, we are told very early, evaluation is impossible. "Literary analysis in general, and the method of this book in particular, can show the kind of relevance that a detail may have, if it has any; but it can never really settle whether the handling of this detail succeeds or fails, and by how much. . . . The present analysis may considerably modify a reader's reactions to the works it examines, by helping him towards a more systematic and more comprehensive picture of what is being done in them. But its purpose is, within this particular field, to provide and elucidate the subject-matter for responses, not to control them." How one can provide (*i.e.*, select), show the relevance of, and elucidate details in subject-matter without controlling the reader's responses to them (and so evaluating them), Mr. Holloway does not inform us, and, luckily,

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he tends to ignore his own dictum in practice; but one more dubious statement in the doubt-crammed introductory chapter—on which, he asserts, depends all the rest of the book—is another blow to the reader's sagging confidence.

The author's naïveté is already plain in his failure to take account of what literary criticism does. It becomes plainer and embarrassing. "One thing which this enquiry will make very clear indeed is that the novelist is every bit as well equipped as the discursive essayist to mediate a view of life." "There is only a difference of degree between a brief incident and the plot of a whole novel, or between a 'character' as a brief comprehensive description of someone and as a personality developed throughout a book." And, vindicating his emphasis on metaphor, Mr. Holloway quotes, with impregnable solemnity, Carlyle's wonderful contribution to Bouvard-and-Pécuchet *sottiserie:* "Prodigious influence of metaphors! Never saw into it till lately."

This sense of complacent self-induced astonishment, which the author here reflects and elsewhere, in his own theoretical moments, radiates directly (discovering that all his life—and he is bursting to tell us—he has been speaking *prose!*), is most inescapably diffused through his treatment of medium. We have just seen him defending the novelist against the essayist and the raconteur against the novelist. He goes on to explain the convenience, for the sage, of the novel-medium:

> The writings of Newman, Carlyle and Arnold himself abound with real or invented examples that illustrate and indeed largely replace general propositions. All that happens when we turn to the novel is that we find illustrative incidents in a story instead of illustrative examples in an argument. Indeed, novelists have here one advantage. A character may be an example of some general principle quite as easily as an incident. This suggestive use of character is used [*sic*] more or less elaborately by all the three novelists considered here and also, most elaborately of all perhaps, by Carlyle in his history.

—all of which, presumably, makes the Carlyle of *The French Revolution* and *Frederick the Great* a more successful sage-novelist or novelist-sage (though the author would doubtless deny that a judgment is implied here) than Disraeli, Eliot, or Hardy. It never seems to occur to Mr. Holloway that Carlyle's histories may in fact be grotesquely tumid pseudo-novels written by a novelist *manqué,* no more persuasive, to any reader undazzled by the accident of historical names and events, than Bulwer-Lytton; that Carlyle's whipping-up of portentous analogies, foreshadowings, and prophetic lamentations whenever Mirabeau blows his nose is pure de Mille; that a character who is "an example of some general principle"—and it is true enough that Carlyle presents no other sort of character—is likely to be less convincing than a straight statement of the principle itself; that to set up characters and incidents against a pasteboard backdrop of destiny is not, as Mr. Holloway suggests, to "hint at the abiding realities of the world."

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The overriding interest—it is there, and survives—of Mr. Holloway's book is in one line of its argument: the painstaking and frequently brilliant analysis of metaphorical texture. So the author demonstrates the moral quality of George Eliot's "scenic" imagery; the relation of Carlyle's most characteristic metaphorical patterns to the sense of cosmic vitality they are intended to convey; Newman's supple, blandly tendentious figures to make self-evident the "riotous and sinister disorder" of Protestantism and the abundant, contained energy of Catholicism; the structural force and pertinence, occasionally, of Hardy's descriptions of animated Nature. There are also isolated successes: valuable comment, especially regarding Rosamond and Lydgate, on that most forbidding and stiffly corseted of great novels, *Middlemarch;* on Newman's use of analogy; on the sage's conscious and overt manipulation of dictionary meanings in order to redefine and reilluminate whole vocabularies.

Still, the only sage who comes out looking at all a sage—and with the drone of her lectern manner in our ears—is George Eliot. Mr. Holloway makes out an unimpeachable (and unintentional) case for Carlyle, not as a sage, but as a failed novelist and a failed mystic, substituting pumped-up history for Aristotelian action, exhortation for vision, excitement for energy; attacking abstraction to breed abstraction; convincing only in his fury at the swamp and muddle of the Victorian conscience. Disraeli is the shrewd and jaunty minor novelist of politics and manorial life, enduring as a "character" or "personality" in the invidious sense, gauzily disguised in his perpetual melodramatic persona of the rejected—and therefore detached, ubiquitous, omniscient—Jew; the principles of "continuity" and "vitality" that the author finds penetrating his novels are only the persistence and animal spirits of the mountebank after all. Newman appears always as the armed and embattled doctrinaire polemicist—for obvious practical reasons, no doubt—and never as the clarifying disinterested mediator of a world-view. Arnold's irony (Mr. Holloway, in a startling betrayal of his own categorizing, admits that Arnold mediates "not a view of the world, but a habit of mind") comes to seem less a habit of mind than a habit of pen: choosing too often the easiest targets; often overshooting even those (consider his handling of Huxley in "Literature and Science"); irony as the emblem of a suppressed self-pity, which leaks out in Arnold's lachrymose, whispery verse and immolates itself at last on the Wagnerian altar of high seriousness. Hardy's novels, in spite of their occasional authentic rendering of man involved in the processes of Nature, remain for the most part ponderous inefficient mechanisms, under the impulsion of a dreary style and an improbable scarecrow fate; and it is pleasant to agree with Mr. Holloway not only that Hardy's best novel is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* but that it is his best because the *absence* of "his characteristic rule of life" "gives it a power and economy and integration unique in Hardy". Mr. Holloway's sage, playing his rôle, can be a bore.

*The Victorian Sage* is one of a number of new books and articles on the

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Victorians, and, for that matter, on the rest of the nineteenth century, in what is beginning to look like, if not quite a renaissance, at least a very sympathetic autopsy. Geoffrey Tillotson, reviewing some of the books,[1] remarks in passing of the nineteenth-century magazines (like *The Cornhill,* which published Thackeray, Ruskin, Arnold, Mrs. Gaskell, etc.): "They represent as big and splendid an achievement as exists anywhere in literature. I mean that they are comparable in literary worth—I admit I cannot but speak vaguely—to the Elizabethan drama." This wooly disingenuousness will fool nobody, but it is a portent; and there are other exultant irruptions from the storm-cellars. There are, also, reassessments: for all its perverseness and dewy-eyed banalities, Mr. Holloway's book; Donald Davie's authoritative examination of Shelley, under the surprisingly favorable auspices of Johnsonian decorum, and his treatment of Hopkins as "only" the greatest of the Victorian poets.[2]

It is just on this subject of the Victorian poets that Mr. Holloway achieves his most memorable silence. Why, devoting himself to Victorian wisdom, does he altogether ignore the three figures who have traditionally been regarded as its sacred repository?

He excludes Tennyson, Browning, and the poet Arnold, and it is a tribute to his discrimination that he does so; it is merely a tribute to his discretion that he does not say why. But a reviewer ought, perhaps, to risk explicitness. Mr. Holloway's reason is not, clearly, that he considers verse incapable of sustaining that comprehensive view of life he is looking for; one of his most vulnerable assumptions is, as we have seen, the relative unimportance of whatever medium the sage happens to find expedient for his constellations of enlightening detail. The reason may in fact be that the Victorian age is impressive, however fitfully and often histrionically, in everything except its poetry, and that the charitable last word on the wisdom of the Victorian poets was spoken by Chesterton, in explanation of Tennyson: "He really did hold a great many of the same views as Queen Victoria, though he was gifted with a more fortunate literary style." Nobody will deny the gift; and a great many will continue, against the threatened resurrection of even the *Idylls of the King,* to see the resemblance. As for Mr. Holloway's opinion, his silence persuades us: in search of Victorian minds, he finds them only elsewhere.

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[1] In *The Sewanee Review,* Spring 1953.

[2] In his excellent, if at times thesis-ridden book, *Purity of Diction in English Verse.* Oxford. $3.00.

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THOMAS BARBOUR

# Trying Not to Dislike Bentley

IN SEARCH OF THEATER, by *Eric Bentley*. Knopf. $6.00.

THE READERS OF ERIC BENTLEY'S *The Playwright as Thinker* (1946) who were provoked to dismiss him as a pretentious academician were roused largely by his cantankerous foreword, in which he picked off one by one every "important" play of the then current Broadway season, with the devastating effect of one firing buckshot at sparrows. Anyone whom indignation did not keep from reading further would have found it a relatively inoffensive and highly competent textbook on modern drama. He would have found it surprisingly conservative, too, energetically defending writers like Ibsen and Shaw, who (though Mr. Bentley does not seem always to be aware of the fact) have achieved a pretty high standing over the years in the opinion of people seriously interested in the theatre arts. The point that Mr. Bentley was trying to make was not quite the simple and obvious one that Shaw, for example, is a greater artist than Mr. Hammerstein. If this seemed sometimes to be all that he was saying, the fault was not altogether his; for there was—and is—a disposition among what he calls the "Broadway intelligentsia" to invite exactly such absurd comparisons. His target, then, was not the entertainment industry as such, but the pseudo-aesthete critics, who have claimed for it a greater profundity than it warrants, and the pseudo-aesthete craftsmen of the theatre, who have introduced into their work a phony intellectualism, corrupting the essential rough honesty of the entertainment business.

To express Mr. Bentley's attitude in such terms, however, is to show him some charity. If this was what the foreword of *The Playwright as Thinker* was meant to convey, it was not precisely what we read there. The critic's rather sour, joyless approach to the actual theatre tended to overcast his delicate distinctions. He might have got away with it if it were not for his scholar's background, which helped to convict him as something of a professorial spoilsport; his adversaries, who were (or thought they were) practical men of the theatre, were not to be impressed. He would have to roll up his sleeves, they said, and pitch into the life of the theatre (like Ibsen and Shaw, they might have added) if he could expect his criticisms to carry any weight with them. Well, since then, he has shown his readiness and willingness to meet the opposition on its own ground; in the past seven years he has, quite conceivably, seen more plays in more theatres than anyone else within the same period, and the list of productions that he has directed all over the map from New York to Munich is certainly an impressive one. The critical and reportorial fruits

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of these years have been collected in his most recent volume; whatever else might be said of him, the author of *In Search of Theatre* effectively refuses to let inexperience mitigate his authority.

The first allowance that must be made for this work is that which must be granted in any such case of a collection of somewhat disassociated articles: not all of them are equally well written, equally inspired, or equally valuable. But, even when this obvious consideration is taken into account, the reader who is not already a confirmed Bentleyite may find himself subject to the same strain that apparently tormented Mr. Bentley when he confronted a certain American playwright and entitled his essay on him, "Trying to Like O'Neill". Though Eugene O'Neill is by no means yet a dead issue, it seems rather more important to me, at this gloomy stage of our theatre's history, to like Mr. Bentley. The fact remains that it is not altogether easy to do so.

Who really likes a critic anyway? His very title is forbidding, and only a few perverse souls can grant him at best more than grudging admiration. Moreover, unless he is a very rare creature indeed, if he should make himself somehow amiable, he will very likely prove himself also wishy-washy and useless in his calling. There is nothing wishy-washy about Eric Bentley, but there is little about him either that invites affection. It might be too much to ask that the harshness of his judgements be occasionally tempered with a little wit; yet it is certainly right to expect of him what is the saving grace of any tolerable critic: I mean, humility. A distressing oracular gas too often envelops his pronouncements; he insists too much upon his own authority and experience and too frequently introduces a subject with a preamble suggesting that, until now, no critic has been adequate to the occasion. The fact that such an intimation precedes an excellent study of Pirandello and one of the finest analyses of Chekhov's craftsmanship I expect ever to read does not, of course, detract from the considerable worth of his criticism; still we might fairly wish that Mr. Bentley would allow us the privilege of discovering his merits for ourselves.

One price he must pay for his Delphic attitude is to discourage mercy in his readers; our perversity urges us to find faults that we might overlook in an author who we did not feel was trying to represent himself as faultless. Mr. Bentley, then, is not guiltless of overstatement, of too great severity when he condemns, of too great leniency where he condones. His conclusion that the Broadway spirit is inimical to the best interests of the theatre is one that I am every day better persuaded to share, yet it disturbs me to find him coping so inadequately with Lillian Hellman, as though he feared that dignifying her with too thorough (even though adverse) an appraisal would be suffering the intrusion of too much light upon his dark prospect of the Broadway scene. It disturbs me even more to find him condemning the Experimental Theatre before its trial and, further, being niggardly in his commendations when this same group presents its evidence with a production of Brecht's *Galileo*. When

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this mood is upon him, his generally valid estimation of Broadway seems less like a conclusion than a premise.

On the other hand, he can be disarmingly blind to the faults of his favorites. The extravagance of his approval of the continental theatre, just as it very often is, can skate perilously close to affectation; where something less than perfection must be confessed, he is able to dismiss it with an insouciance no American subject could hope for. Jean-Louis Barrault, for example, is not only a great actor, but the kind of actor of whom the American stage stands in desperate need; to admit that his artistry has significant limitations, more serious than Mr. Bentley allows, need not obscure our appreciation of its even more significant merits. Possibly he is unaware of the almost vituperative scorn heaped upon M. Barrault these days by the young theatre-addicts of the Left Bank; it is certainly excessive and far from just, but it may remind us, as Mr. Bentley does not, that this actor, even in his best roles, is not wholly exempt from the charge of shameless exhibitionism.

As might be expected, Mr. Bentley is at his best with a subject that does not seem to compel him to stack his cards. If his tribute to Shaw tends to be inadequate and surprisingly maudlin, his essays on Copeau, Etienne Decroux, and Stark Young are remarkably able and perceptive. He is dealing here with men with whom he is either temperamentally or ideologically not in full accord and yet whose intelligence and sensibility forbid his contempt; as a result he can discuss them with a degree of justice and temperance that is regrettably not always his most striking characteristic. The piece on Stark Young is especially valuable for its illumination, not only of the fine critic that is its subject, but, by contrast, of his only successor here of equivalent stature: the author. If the virtues of the one might only correct the vices of the other—if Mr. Young's sensitivity and enthusiastic appreciation of particulars might be coupled with Mr. Bentley's rigorous, if dogmatic, total view—, we might have a better critic than we should dare to hope for.

Mr. Bentley has something to learn, too, of that linguistic felicity which he rightly admires in his predecessor. It would prevent his too great reliance upon stock epithets, which seem appropriate enough to particular instances but whose power is easily vitiated by overuse. The charge of effeminacy is a telling one, justified in one way by a certain kind of British or pseudo-British theatricalism; but Mr. Bentley's hypnotic attachment to the term comes to suggest that he is too willing to take refuge in it from the critic's responsibility of careful discrimination. It does not help, for example, to lump under the same heading, without further clarification, the decor of Cecil Beaton, the plays of Christopher Fry, and Marlon Brando's interpretation of Stanley Kowalski (and not—why not?—Barrault's conception of Hamlet). Another of his refuges is in the jargon of quasi-Marxist social criticism. In these days when the nicer gradations of political opinion are smudged by intolerant misconceptions, I hesitate to

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mention this aspect of Mr. Bentley's thinking, important as it may be. Perhaps it would suffice to say that much of his critical equipment that was evidently assembled in the 'thirties seems now, in spite of the fury in Washington, much less alarming than *passé*.

To dwell at such length upon the irritating qualities of Mr. Bentley's manner is to suggest that he is not a perfect critic, certainly that he is not an ingratiating critic; still it should not be wholly a disservice to him if exposing his limitations frees us to appreciate his gifts. What is there left to like in Mr. Bentley? The answer is, in spite of the weight of contrary evidence: a very great deal. To state his virtues more succinctly than I have described his deficiencies is rather to emphasize than slight them, since they are involved in the very foundation of his critical approach and do not therefore lend themselves so easily to illustration by particulars. At the heart of his polemic lies the conception that theatre—and not simply dramatic literature—is an art worthy of the same intellectual dedication as any other, on the part alike of both critic and creator. In a country like France, where the problems of the theatre have customarily engaged the attentions of first-flight literary intelligences, to honor a critic for such an opinion might seem like ridiculous stressing of the obvious; but, as Mr. Bentley correctly points out, the very absence of this fundamental attitude is characteristic of the Broadway situation and perhaps the greatest single obstacle to the development of a truly important theatre in America. Among our playwrights only Eugene O'Neill suggests exemption from his censure, but quite possibly his stature is defined chiefly by his singularity; even if he were shown more satisfactory than Mr. Bentley finds him, he would stand forth only as the exception that proves the rule. As for critics of recent prominence, Stark Young certainly has worked under the assumption that the theatre is properly within the province of the cultivated man. But who else? Others, like John Gassner and perhaps George Jean Nathan, may give timid and tentative, however welcome, consent to the proposition, but they are scarcely of the order of Gide or Cocteau, Yeats or Dryden, or even Mr. Young. Eric Bentley does not flirt with the idea of the intellectual in the theatre, and he does more than merely assume it; he insists upon it, and from this insistence, which may be one source of his distressing arrogance, stems his most signal critical importance.

The first consequence of his crusading point of view is to turn an unflattering light upon those who have rushed to fill the vacuum in our theatre, created by the negligence of better minds. These are the same "Broadway intelligentsia" that fared so badly in the foreword to the *Playwright as Thinker,* and Mr. Bentley is after them again in the first chapter of *In Search of Theater.* This crucial essay has, as I have already suggested, its weakness in the writer's tendency simply to fly into a despairing rage and call everyone connected with Broadway stupid, a proposition that is not perhaps quite correct and certainly not very profitable. But it has its strength, too, in the definition of that typical

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point of view that rationalizes the expulsion of the mind from the theatre and lends a spurious intellectual justification to an essentially anti-intellectual thesis: "*that drama is not primarily a form of poetry, a vision of life, an expression of the dramatist's nature, or anything comparable to other works of art, but a matter of theatrical technique in which the chief factor is the existence of an audience.*"

Even though Mr. Bentley's attitude—the opposite of what I have just cited—surely suggests a far more fruitful theatre, we have heard objections (specifically from John Gassner in several recent issues of *Theatre Arts*) that it threatens our stage with sterility. On the surface the complaint appears thoroughly absurd, and I should not even allude to it were it not that I think I can appreciate Mr. Gassner's fears. They have—or should have—nothing to do with Mr. Bentley's central thesis. If they have any basis at all (presuming, of course, that his criticism will in some way be effective), it is to be found not so much in his ideas as in his expression of them. Should, one of these days, his prayer for the establishment of a true "art theatre" be providentially granted, I hope it will not turn out to be merely the stamping ground of a contemptuous coterie, unwilling to recognize any connection between their work and that of the public stage. Some of the plays that might concern them (such as those proposed in Mr. Bentley's two anthologies[1]) seem to me less important in themselves than as sources for a better theatre to come. I am not convinced, for example, that E. E. Cummings's *him* is absolutely superior to some of the O'Neill plays that Mr. Bentley scorns: yet it may well be that, offered in the proper spirit, without false claims and without jealousy, it could contribute to the theatre in a way that no O'Neill play could—in the way, perhaps, that the inferior products of the University Wits helped significantly to refine the talent of a Shakespeare. I am led to speak of this because I observe how thin a line divides the intellectual from the intellectual snob and how perilously close Mr. Bentley can come to crossing that awful boundary.

I might wish, furthermore, that his proper abhorrence of Broadway theatricalism will not come to limit his apprecation of the full potentialities of theatric communication. He would be the last to admit the possibility; but, again, it is easy to become skeptical of all emotionalism in one's carefulness to condemn sentimentality, and Mr. Bentley can be over-cautious about betraying the lively enjoyment of the theatre we might expect of one so deeply committed to it. At any rate, I hope he will not dismiss utterly as *kitsch* the warning of one who is somewhat less of a confirmed anti-romantic than he: that, vitally necessary to our theatre as it is, a disciplined mind should be a complement to, and not a substitute for, a responsive heart.

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[1] *From the Modern Repertoire, Series One and Two.* University of Denver Press. $5.00, $6.00. (Now available through the Indiana University Press.)

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SIDNEY MONAS

# Fiction Chronicle: "No Mommy and No Daddy"[1]

ANNE DE TOURVILLE, in her Prix Femina novel, *Wedding Dance,* has done something delicate. She has told a love story through the sensibility of a peasant community (two Breton villages; one hill, one valley) largely in terms of ceremony and ritual, without any pretentiousness or pedantry, as though this were the simplest and most direct way to tell such a story. A rich peasant dies and is buried; his son falls in love with a poor girl, whom the power-crazed widow despises. At the wedding, the widow breaks her resolution to maintain propriety, and curses her son together with his bride. The girl flees, unable to cope with the old woman's hatred. Sick and hysterical, she hides in exile with an old shepherdess, while the village searches for her. The beadle's wife, meanwhile, a woman of great spiritual sensitivity, whose transcendant love for people has been nourished by the usages of custom, tries to employ her psychic gift to conjure up the girl's whereabouts. She finds instead, to her horror, an image of the girl's death—"a beautiful death"—which she "takes upon herself", offering to die in the girl's place. The malevolent widow goes off to live alone, the beadle's wife dies, the girl returns to the village. The story is simple and clear as a fairy tale, which gains curiously from a dimension of cause and effect not entirely material.

There are some fine satiric bits, and custom is not represented, as far as the lives of the villagers are concerned, as everywhere adequate—but the girl's return to the community with her husband, her assumption of full womanhood, is charged with a power it would not have were it not for the background of symbol and rite. As for the rest of the world so immensely surrounding the tiny villages of Feunten Yen and the Collines Brûlées, there is this random bit:

> Chatter of all kinds could be heard. . .
>
> . . . .
>
> "The Parisians," piped a shrill voice, "the Parisians, my poor girl? I don't suppose they're any stupider than anyone else. The trouble is they've never seen anything!"
>
> . . . .
>
> ". . . one of them spoke to me once; he was a bank clerk, in the fourth basement, he said. Eh, what on earth can a man know who lives underground?"

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[1]WEDDING DANCE, by *Anne de Tourville,* transl. by *Mervyn Savill.* Farrar, Straus & Young. $3.00. NINE STORIES, by *J. D. Salinger.* Little Brown. $3.00. THE RETREAT, by *P. H. Newby.* Knopf. $3.00. GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN, by *James Baldwin.* Knopf. $3.50. THIS HAPPY RURAL SEAT, by *George Lanning.* World. $3.50.

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Within the enclave, love, death, greed, high policy, escape, and return have their ceremonies and, rich in melody, subtle in counterpoint, their dance.

A quick trip from Feunten Yen to the suburbia of Salinger's stories is apt to leave one feeling orphaned and displaced, or at least a bit stray. Among Salinger's people, symbols are private and communication extremely difficult at best. Love and hate have nothing to grow on and get reduced in the end to passive submission (or suicide) and petty malice. Children and nuns, because they are pure, maintain a kind of semi-communicable sincerity, an inventiveness of ritual that enables them to "understand" and to love each other or some aspect of the child in an adult. (The theme of the wise child and the vulgarised adult comes close to self-parody in "Teddy", the last story in this collection.) At best, innocence hangs by a thread. Suicide, breakdown, self-pity, misunderstanding: these loom heavy for the sensitive, nervous young man who is so witty in passing, so nice to children.

In "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut", a myopic little girl leads an imaginary beau named Jimmy Jimereeno by the hand; he has green eyes and black hair, a sword, and "no mommy and no daddy". The girl's mother, meanwhile, supports in roughly equivalent "adult" (i.e. corrupt, self-pitying) terms the phantom of an old lover killed in the war. The mother does her best to block out from her life this child which seems to her physically so like its dull "unworthy" father who commutes. She is indifferent to the correspondence of pain and loneliness between herself and the little girl. She indulges in some highball-soaked reminiscing with an old college crony after hysterically getting the child out of the way. "I was a nice girl," the mother asks, thinking of her old lover who once felt sorry for her. "Wasn't I?"

The next stage after this is indifference to the self, self-abasement. In "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" a suburban lawyer interrupts a powerful self-sentimentalization and allows himself to be cuckolded in order to avoid getting into trouble with his boss.

Although the stories in this book are none of them quite as good as *The Catcher in the Rye,* some are very good indeed. Salinger has a quick ear and a fine talent, reminiscent, especially in the flair for stylised dialogue, of Ring Lardner's; but to a certain extent he lacks detachment and distinterestedness. One has sometimes an oppressive and uncomfortable awareness of the author's nervous involvement in the hurt of his sensitive, witty, suicidal heroes. One also senses in these stories, as in the novel, a peculiar conceptual separation of the child from the adult, as though they were of different species, not merely different ages. For the child, anything is possible; for the adult, conformity or death.

*The Retreat* by P. H. Newby is the kind of book that sets one speculating about the death of the novel. It is fluent, certainly not *kitsch,* interesting up to a point, neatly constructed, but in the long run empty and meaningless. All its tricks and technique lead nowhere.

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The story, which is not without its spell, is a retreat within a retreat within a retreat. The hero, having just emerged from a military hospital in France, gets caught up in the British retreat to the channel ports. He is anxious only to get back to his wife, whom he loves intolerably (she reminds him of his mother)—but when his boat is bombed in crossing and he loses his papers, he assumes another identity and instead of going to his wife, he visits a couple who have been childhood friends of his. The woman, who had given birth some time before to a dead baby, is mad. She hates her husband, who, it must be admitted, *is* terribly attentive. She asks the hero to run off with her. At a seaside resort, she tries to drown them both. The man broods as he watches her little white sand-flecked buttocks flip on down the beach—but he sticks with her. Among some rocks, he comes on a dead airman washed up by the tide. He doesn't dare turn the corpse over, because he might recognise it, and it might be Phlebas the Phoenician, or it might be himself. The hero and *la belle dame sans merci* flit from place to place, but what he really wants all the while is to escape from her and get back to his wife.

I suppose this is a latter day black novel, without some of the too famous lapses of taste committed in that genre. Mr. Newby has set up all the scaffoldings of skill, tightened the external paraphernalia of strangeness and surprise, but inside there is nothing except perhaps vague traces of a mood. But a novel is about people or it is not about anything. Here there are only names that move or stand still for arbitrary reasons. There is no novel.

A long way indeed from *The Retreat* is James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain,* a first novel of unusual promise. If it sprawls a bit, it is from overfullness. If the last section seems unnecessarily turgid and obscure, there is enough impelling excitement and energy to carry one past even the awkwardness of a weak ending.

In the Temple of the Fire Baptised, one of Harlem's numerous store-front churches, a guilt-ridden adolescent boy named John hears the "call" and is struck down in spite of himself before the altar of the Lord. John's vision, which begins with a dark struggle and ends only ironically in the light, is climactic. He has been waiting, estranged and guilty, in a room that is heavy-laden—while loss, grief, despair, struggle, and quivering frustration are whipped into a passion by tambourine, piano, and the voices of the faithful. One by one, he sees the members of his family (except his brother, who is not at church) "fall" to the Spirit. The boy feels all the past bitterness of the assembled lives encroaching upon him, and especially his step-father's life, to humble and dehumanise him and send him kicking in the dust, "like the other niggers", and he resists desperately; but on the one hand his own feeling of guilt, and on the other the light-struck figure of Elisha, an older boy who has spoken "in tongues" with great power, draw him on. He goes down in pain, demonised, possessed, something not himself kicking in his groin; but he emerges into the

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light, touched perhaps by God. Ironically, his father grudges him the experience, having wanted it desperately to fall on his own wayward son, Royal.

The past lives and emotions of the family are gathered up into the story. As each person is moved by the Spirit, the author searches back into the life, the accumulation of suffering that has led to the moment of possession. This exploration of shack and tenement, love, hate, defeat, is magnificently done, especially in the case of John's step-father, the ex-preacher. The scene in which the proud old man on a dangerous night in a Southern town overhears some white men first threaten him, and then agree to let him pass because he is one of the "good Niggers", is moving indeed.

Only John, struck down on the threshing-floor, seems incompletely drawn. In the book's early pages he appears clearly enough as an awkward, somewhat intellectually inclined, sensitive, curious boy just beginning to realise the bitterness of his position in a crushing and hateful white world (of which, not the white man but his own father is the closest representative)—a world he nevertheless has to accept.

But character in a novel (as Ralph Ellison aptly remarks on the jacket) is character in process, and while this is amply realised in the other figures, John's crucial revelation and the meaning it has for him is never brought sufficiently out of the dark. John's feeling toward his father (in a way, the pivotal emotion of the entire novel) has changed in no very clear way as a result of his experience on the threshing-floor. The family's walk home from church in the Harlem dawn, with the occasional clang of an ambulance down the thoroughfare, is admirably handled in physical terms, but the new family situation is still not made clear, and the bit about Florence's letter from the preacher's former wife seems to me pure *deus ex machina.*

On the whole, Mr. Baldwin's style admirably sustains what he has to say about his characters. He uses a biblical phraseology, deliberately hacked here and there by cliche and parody. He has a keen sense of place and objects and their relation to character. The language and the furniture represent a desperate religious culture—a prison as well as a fortress—the life assailing and the life within. The piano and tambourines, the dingy facades, the rocks of Central Park, as described by Mr. Baldwin, all enhance the people who live among them, help place them in their true relation to each other and to people in general. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is happily literate, without being, like *The Retreat,* merely "literary".

Nietzsche has a remark to the effect that the idea that love can conquer everything is a feminine superstition, and Faulkner, with marvellous high indignation once set out to show (in *Wild Palms*) that in our society at any rate love raises more obstacles than it can surmount. George Lanning's first book, *This Happy Rural Seat,* does its best to cast doubt on these opinions.

In spite of some Jamesian mannerisms, which are a little irritating at first,

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Mr. Lanning's novel shows a remarkable control of language and theme. Herbert Komar, a second generation American, a man of unformed character, wants to buy a house which a middle-aged Anglo-Saxon woman of deep frigidity (Blanche Lloyd) and her even more appalling mother (Lily) do not really want to sell. He finds himself caught up in a forbidding game of profferment and withdrawal that he doesn't entirely understand. Amidst unaccustomed stress and anxiety, his boarding-house routine is fatally interrupted, and he even begins to find that his job—he is a public accountant—no longer absorbs him. A picture he has seen in the Lloyd's house, the portrait of Mary Bush, an Irish girl, Lily's step-mother, sustains him in his will to acquire a personality and a place. Lily had had no stomach for this ghostly, gay, and beautiful invader of the Lloyds' former "rural seat", not simply because she was a charming interloper who "hooked" a Lloyd, but because Mary had loved the Lloyds' Eden in a way that Lily could not. Captivated by the ghost of Mary Bush, Herbert Komar finds strength to set out for the "rural seat" to win over Blanche Lloyd; as Lily grossly puts it, "to conquer the virgin country". There is, of course, much more to it than this brief summary. There is the entire architecture of a city in it as well, and a quaintly (but not coyly) designed parable of the Fall. Sequences are remarkable in themselves: Mrs. Hlavaty's boarding-house parties; Herbert Komar's interview with Mrs. Mentone in a bar; Mrs. Mentone's wonderful talk in general ("*She* wouldn't know scotch if it stood up in her glass and played the bagpipes") and her various descriptions of the ghosts that haunt her; Herbert Komar's drive with Blanche Lloyd out of the city; Lily Lloyd's visit to his boarding-house; and many others, impressive enough in themselves, but carefully worked into the pattern of the whole.

When it is all over, I must say that I find myself still unconvinced that love will conquer all; but that is a personal matter. There is no calling into question, in any case, Mr. Lanning's very impressive mastery of craft.

IRVING SINGER

# The Logic of Our Language

LOGIC AND LANGUAGE, ed. by *A. G. N. Flew*. Philosophical Library. First Series, $3.75. Second Series, $4.75.

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PHILOSOPHY in the last twenty years is largely the history of the linguistic movement that originated with the later Wittgenstein at Cambridge and was developed by Ryle, Austin, Waismann and others at Oxford. It is a movement within analytical philosophy, within the tradition established by Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, and the logical positivists; but it

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is a movement that has sought to substitute common-sense for Russell's faith in science and mathematics, to employ greater pluralistic subtlety in its analyses of language than Moore brought to bear, and to liberate philosophy from a host of arbitrary distinctions that the logical positivists introduced or, more often, inherited from earlier rationalistic writers. The new movement has achieved widespread recognition only in recent years, partially because it developed within a milieu that emphasized conversation rather than publication, partially because the nature of its outlook was such as to require a piece-meal reconstruction of philosophy instead of the quick formulation of new systems with a capital S.

In these two volumes twenty-one essays by seventeen different writers have been collected as a representative sample of work within the movement. All of the essays reflect professional interests in logic and language; most of them also try to show how the new approach of the linguistic movement leads to the solution of problems about time, induction, sense-data, verifiability, political and legal responsibility, religious belief, universals, causation, knowledge of other minds, valuation, ethical choice, historical explanation, mathematics, and theory construction. Although all but three of the essays have been previously published in scholarly journals, they generally presuppose very little acquaintance with the philosophical issues at hand. Their pace is leisurely: the essays amble towards their conclusions instead of barking them out in the curt fashion of the mathematical logician, and they are less academic and better written than most current technical studies. (All the same, one is occasionally treated to a morsel such as the following contribution by Ryle: "It is to treat as freely shuffleable counters factors the determinate roles of which in the combination into which they can enter are just what constitute their types.")

The essays are filled with all the variety, and even divergency, of opinion that could be expected from members of a movement that refuses to call itself a "school" or to adopt distinctive slogans. Still, it is clear that all of the writers do belong to the same school, even to the point of sometimes seeming parochial in their acceptance of its basic approach. This approach grew out of Wittgenstein's complaint that "most questions and propositions of the philosophers result from the fact that we do not understand the logic of our language". In order to understand the logic of language one had to realize that although two expressions might be *grammatically* similar they could nevertheless be *logically* wholly dissimilar. To suppose that two sentences were of the same logical form merely because they were of the same grammatical form could only lead to absurdity, and this was the kind of absurdity traditional philosophers had often committed. "It would be absurd," Flew remarks in the Introduction to the First Series, "but it would also be easy, to be misled by the grammatical similarity of 'It goes on to London' to 'It goes on to Infinity' into the misconception that 'Infinity' like 'London' refers to a place, albeit a very queer and very inaccessible place." And this misconception he

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relates to the confusion between grammatical and logical forms which Lewis Carroll exploits in *Through the Looking Glass:*

> "I see nobody on the road," said Alice.
> "I only wish *I* had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too! Why, it's as much as *I* can do to see real people, by this light!"

It is this kind of logical mistake that Ryle examines in his essays, "Categories" and "Systematically Misleading Expressions". By determining what are logical forms or categories, Ryle seeks to elucidate the absurdity of expressions that resemble "Saturday is in bed" but are more insidious and of greater philosophic import. The task of the analytical philosopher becomes the detection of linguistic confusions—misleading deviations from standard verbal uses in either ordinary or technical discourse. Correspondingly, in "The Philosopher's Use of Analogy" Macdonald distinguishes between the activities of scientists, who use words to make factual statements about the world, and of philosophers, who use words to make statements about the *uses of words* rather than matters of fact. Macdonald then goes on to say that the traditional metaphysics of form and matter, essences, universals, etc., not only told us nothing about the world but also employed illegitimate analogies, metaphors that involved a deviation from ordinary language:

> They (metaphysical theories) depend for their understanding, as scientific theories do not, *entirely* upon the known uses of ordinary words. They do not extend the use of these words but generally only misuse them. It is for this reason that such philosophical propositions have been called senseless. They try to operate with ordinary words when they have deprived them of their ordinary functions. They recombine known words in an unfamiliar way while trading on their familiar meanings. [Her italics.]

This conception of what philosophy is and ought to be serves as a basis for most of the essays in the collection. Thus, Findlay prefaces his common-sensical treatment of philosophical puzzles about time with the reflection that: "we are sometimes thrown into a mood of interrogation not because we are in quest of further facts, but because we are in quest of clearer, or less discordant, or merely different ways of verbally dealing with those facts." And when Hart seeks the answer to his question "What is the correct analysis of the concept of a human action?" he does not profess to examine any body of empirical facts but merely to concentrate upon the standard or confusing uses of the verb "to do". The twofold program of these essayists is evident: first, to limit the field of philosophy proper to the analysis of verbal use; and second, to damn traditional (particularly metaphysical) philosophy by suggesting that most of it amounted to a mere misuse of language.

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On both of these points the new linguistic faith goes too far, I think. For in the problems that interest philosophers there generally is no fixed or standard use of language beyond the pale of which absurdity lies. Philosophers use metaphors to describe the world, and absurdity occurs only when a metaphor has been used improperly. But when can a metaphor be said to be "improper"? Doesn't that depend upon the state of affairs, the facts, that the metaphor is used to clarify? If this is so, the philosopher can discriminate between sensible and absurd expressions only by examining the factual data in question, only by deciding whether or not the metaphors invoked are "empirically valid", "faithful to reality", "true to experience", or whatever phrase one prefers. A metaphorical expression is absurd when it draws a cock-eyed picture of the world, not when it deviates from some standard use that may or may not exist.

Moreover, it would be as harmful to limit philosophy to ordinary language as it would be to limit poetry. In their reaction against scientific models, several of the essayists wisely insist upon the kinship between philosophy and art, particularly poetry. But consider what would happen if we took the above quotation from Macdonald and substituted "some poetic statements" for "metaphysical theories." We should then read that some poetic statements "try to operate with ordinary words when they have deprived them of their ordinary functions. They recombine known words in an unfamiliar way while trading on their meanings." This sounds fine: an excellent description of what *good* poetry does. But who would say that such poetry was a misuse of language, or that it was senseless, or that it didn't really tell us (sometimes) important things about the world? Of course, we may have to put a gloss on the word "tell" in order to make sure that it suggests more than a dull recital of details. I may tell you what time it is, but I may also tell you what it feels like to be alive. Indeed, this is one of the things that poets *and* metaphysicians do often try to tell us. When they fail, they can be liars and abysmal bores. But it would be a mistake to shut them up in advance by means of a fancy analytical trick. Not only would we lose their insights, but also our analysis would be wrong in overlooking one of the most important functions of language.

Fortunately, the essayists are not always consistent in their approach. In "The Language of Political Theory", Macdonald relents in her condemnation of philosophical analogy. She there admits that the language of the philosopher "has some relation to certain facts" and is capable of calling attention "in a very vivid way to facts and experiences of whose existence we all know but which, for some reason, it seems important to emphasize." And Austin succeeds in his masterful essay on "Other Minds" precisely because he does not limit himself to the linguistic thesis with which he began. In his attempt to determine the nature of human knowledge, Austin examines the standard uses of the verb "to know". But in the heart of his most crucial arguments, he does more than linguistic analysis: he also refers to the structure of our actual experi-

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ence. For instance, he criticizes the belief in sense-data (perceptual elements which are supposed to be certain or indubitable because they exclude all interpretation) by showing that even in the case of colors we are not always sure of what we see: ". . . she always *thought* his shirt was white until she saw it against Tommy's Persil-washed one" (his italics). Notice that Austin is here referring not to the lady's use of the word 'white', but rather to her *experience* of the shirt as something white in color.

Even more encouraging is the fact that one of the essayists faces up to the methodological issue and refuses to limit himself to the linguistic thesis. In "Gods", John Wisdom formulates conclusions that are as interesting for philosophy of art as for philosophy of religion. He compares religious controversies with aesthetic ones and shows how in both there is a sense in which facts are not relevant but another sense in which they are:

> Suppose two people are looking at a picture or natural scene. One says 'Excellent' or 'Beautiful' or 'Divine'; the other says 'I don't see it.' He means he doesn't see the beauty. And this reminds us of how we felt the theist accuse the atheist of blindness and the atheist accuse the theist of seeing what isn't there. And yet surely each sees what the other sees. It isn't that one can see part of the picture which the other can't see. So the difference is in a sense not one as to the facts. . . . And yet . . . to settle a dispute as to a picture we look again. Someone perhaps points to emphasize certain features and we see it in a different light. . . . If in spite of all this we choose to say that a difference as to whether a thing is beautiful is not a factual difference we must be careful to remember that there is a procedure for settling these differences and that this consists not only in reasoning and redescription as in the legal case, but also in a more literal resetting-before with re-looking and re-listening.

This kind of variant approach finds some support in the two essays of Waismann which appear in this collection. In "Verifiability" Waismann tries to break down any sharp bifurcation between language and "the facts" by showing that our experience of the world is itself a function of "methods of comprehension" which are already present in language. On these grounds, the separation between scientist and philosopher becomes harder to effect in the way that Macdonald suggested. At the same time, however, Waismann has no intention of assimilating philosophy with science. In "Language Strata" he presents a "new picture of language" in which the search for scientific precision is subordinated to the search for techniques that explain vagueness and ambiguity in ordinary discourse. Waismann suggests that most of our concepts have an "open texture" inasmuch as they can never be defined completely and therefore always retain the possibility of vagueness; and his pluralistic analysis of language strata tries to show that the same term may function in

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different ways when it operates in different kinds of statements. In all this, Waismann elaborates and elucidates another approach that underlies much of the linguistic movement. In their reaction against logical positivism's adulation of physics and mathematics as the models for all critical disciplines, the new philosophers of language have sought to emphasize the irreducible individuality of non-scientific fields. In this collection Hart, Austin and others question the positivistic distinction between cognitive and emotive modes of discourse by pointing to statements that could not be analyzed as either cognitive or emotive. Each use of language, and ultimately each statement, is held to have a logic of its own—each of them has its own job to perform in its own way. Accordingly, vagueness and ambiguity are not poor substitutes for precision that must be eliminated, but rather valid means of communication that need to be studied and understood for their own sake.

The importance of analyzing vagueness and ambiguity is no news perhaps to anyone other than the philosophers. Ever since the early days of I. A. Richards, semanticists and literary critics have been particularly aware of the need for such analysis, and it is astounding that the new philosophers remain so scrupulously mum about their indebtedness to the toilers in these fields. The fact remains, however, that in its ability to analyze ordinary discourse, and particularly ordinary non-scientific discourse, the linguistic movement has proved itself more sane, subtle, and common-sensical than any previous school in English philosophy.

Nevertheless, one cannot help noting that the concern for vagueness and ambiguity has often landed these philosophers in unnecessary difficulties. For instance, because the word 'true' is ambiguously employed, Waismann concludes that the truth of a law of nature is wholly different from the truth of a proverb. To say that a law of nature is true is to mean "that it is well established by experimental evidence or other observation, that it brings widely different things into a close connection and makes us 'understand' what seemed a mystery before; that it simplifies our theoretical system, and further, that it is fruitful in leading us to predictions and new discoveries." With respect to proverbs and the experiences they express Waismann finds a totally different situation: "Truth, in this case, is inseparably tied up with the literary quality of your writing: it needs no less than a poet to express fully and faithfully such fragile states of mind. How you say it matters even more than what you say." But this seems very strange. Does not a proverb like 'Out of sight, out of mind' resemble laws of nature in being established by observation (if not exactly experimental evidence), in bringing widely different things into a close connection, in making us understand what seemed a mystery before, in simplifying our theoretical system, and in being fruitful for further predictions and discoveries? That this is so becomes especially clear when we pit 'Out of sight, out of mind' against a conflicting proverb such as 'Distance makes the heart

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grow fonder.' If these proverbs differed only in their "literary quality" (whatever that is), we could hardly think of them as being in conflict. And yet, when both proverbs are universalized to cover all of life, they are as contradictory of one another as any two antithetical laws of nature. Poetic truth is not the same as scientific truth, and we do well to distinguish between them; but in failing to realize how these different kinds of truth inevitably overlap, Waismann convicts himself of faulty analysis.

The attempts by other of the essayists to analyze terms like "real", "good", "politically justifiable", etc., warrant similar criticism. Traditional philosophers sought to define words like these in a systematic, if somewhat artificial, manner. Their definitions generally turned out to be insensitive to the varieties of discourse. The new linguistic philosophers are sensitive to the ambiguities and the vaguenesses of our language, but their fear of system-making has prevented them from seeing the continuities between different kinds of expressions. Perhaps they are too much in revolt against scientific models. This would explain their desire to keep philosophy on a linguistic leash instead of letting it wander into the world of factual data. Philosophy may resemble poetry more than it resembles science; but poetry does not exclude itself from an interest in reality and it attains its effect through the expression of unity as well as diversity. Although the new linguistic movement comes as a welcome ally against the adoration of science which has been so oppressive in our times, we may yet have reason to fear its own limitations.

ROBERT GRAVES

# Progressive Puericulture

A FAT, COMPLACENT, BOSOMY VOLUME,[1] which looks well in a publisher's list, or on a headmistress's desk, though its practical use defeats me. If it gave a dated sequence of characteristic children's books in English, published since the sixteenth century; extracts to show their form and style, supported by contemporary illustrations; and brief notes on the authors, explaining for what sort of children they wrote, and why, that would be something. The historical links which unite John Bunyan's *County Rhymes for Children:*

[1] A CRITICAL HISTORY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A Survey of Children's Books in English from Earliest Times to the Present, by *Cornelia Meigs, Ann Eaton, Elizabeth Nesbitt* and *Ruth Hill Viguers*. Macmillan. $7.50.

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Would God I might be saved,
Might have an heart like David,
Nor be by sin enslaved!

My sin grew great and boiled,
And me throughout defiled,
O Lord, how I am spoiled!

with such modern technological idylls as *Bungo the Runaway Truck* or *The Frigidaire That Went Warm,* are well worth enumerating. Again a select list of books available for children's libraries would be something; if arranged in categories to match the age, sex and environment of prospective readers. But this *Critical History* is neither historical nor critical.

Numerous parent-teacher conferences seem to have endowed the compilers with so blind a trust in the virtues of compromise and tolerance that they administer no least reproof to any book or author in their survey; while sugar-plums, apparently extracted from publishers' blurbs, are ten a penny:

> *Blueberries for Sal* (1948) is fragrant with the pines and sun-drenched bushes of Mr. McCloskey's Maine island home, spiced with surprise, and warm with the fun and beauty of family relationships.

A starry-eyed chapter by Cornelia Meigs on the English heritage of Celtic Myth contains a mass of mis-statements and mis-spellings, taken over from irresponsible nursery editions of Irish and Welsh and Scottish bardic tales, which could easily have been avoided by recourse to the original translations. Plenty of space has been found for a discussion of Wordsworth and Christina Rossetti, neither of whom were children's poets; but I can find no mention of Ambrose ('*Namby-Pamby*') Philips, 1695-1749, the first reputable author to use baby-language in verse; nor, among more recent poets, of Hilaire Belloc, whose *Bad Child's Book of Beasts* and *Cautionary Tales* would head any representative British list of verse classics. Several pages of tedious biographical material are devoted to Jean Jacques Rousseau, Maria Edgeworth, and Thomas Day, unrelieved by quotations from their works; while *Mrs. Markham's Histories,* though among the most popular schoolroom books on both sides of the Atlantic a hundred years ago, and the first to eliminate what she herself described as 'the horrors of history', are passed over.

Omitted also are the first dictionaries for children, such as Anna Brownwell Murphy's, compiled about 1810:

> TO ABANDON, is to leave or go away from; an *abandoned* man or woman, means a *very wicked* man or woman.
> ABBEY, a place where a number of religious people, either men or women, live together.
> TO ABHOR, to hate, to dislike very much indeed; as *'God abhors liars.'*

And the 'catechisms' of the same date, such as Hackman's:

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Q. What were the principal events in 1776?
A. The *Congress* published a declaration of independency, and took the title of the *Independent States of America;* they also ordered their ships to carry colours with thirteen stripes, to represent the thirteen united provinces.
Q. What was the other most noted event in the year 1776?
A. One hundred thousand pounds additional revenue was granted to His Majesty, on account of his large family; making his annual income nine hundred thousand pounds.

And Pinnock's:

Q. What is coral?
A. A substance formed at the bottom of the sea.
Q. How is it formed?
A. By animals called Polypi.
Q. How many kinds of coral are there?
A. Red, white and black.
Q. What does red coral resemble in appearance?
A. Sealing-wax.
Q. What is sealing-wax made of?
A. Shell-lac and rosin.
Q. What is shell-lac?
A. An animal substance.
Q. Where is it found?
A. On trees in the East Indies.
Q. What is rosin?
A. The sap of the fir-tree.

And Samuel Prior's *Universal Traveller,* a popular condensation of travel books:

> The condition of the people in Connecticut and Rhode Island is an absence of the extreme, either of wealth or of poverty. The land is very stony, and the price of produce not commensurate to that of labour. The absence of negroes from these last-mentioned states gives me much pleasure; certainly not on account of a prejudice against our darker-tinged fellow-creatures, or from a belief that they are of an inferior order in creation; but from a hatred of oppression, whether exercised in a monarchy or a republic, more especially, indeed, in the latter, which, professing to be built on the basis of freedom, *ought* to respect the rights and protect the liberties of all. In the states of New York and Jersey the treatment of Americans of colour, by their white countrymen, is worse than that of the brute creation.

And the Rev. Isaac Taylor's admirable geographic primers, with hand-coloured plates—the European, Asian, African and American Series:

> In one district of Barbary the people dwell in caves: this seems to indicate great barbarism, and we need not wonder to find therefore, that

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in stormy weather they go down to the coast in great numbers, and if they see any ship, instead of pitying the poor mariners, they pray to God to dash it on the rocks and destroy it, in order that they may plunder the wreck, and make slaves of all the people.

To pray to God seems very right,
How pleasing thus to kneel!
And when a vessel toils in sight,
We for the sailors feel.

But here is prayer abus'd indeed,
Heaven hears, but hates the sound:
'Tis base to hurt them in their need,
To wish them wreck'd, and drown'd.

Religion should to kindness train,
'Tis doing good, not ill:
Our piety is all in vain,
If we can rob and kill.

There is a most inadequate mention of Isaac Taylor's witty and original sister Jane, who not only wrote *Twinkle, Little Star,* but demurely parodied the moralistic verse of her time and was never caught out. In one poem, an excited little girl begs to see the Chinese giant, Chang, who has just reached London. The mother replied portentously:

But a lady this morning has also arriv'd
Who of both arms and legs has from birth been depriv'd
And yet is, *in a number of ways,* as expert
As if she were able those limbs to exert . . .
Yes, MISS BIFFIN'S example most forcibly stands
As a silent rebuke to all indolent hands.

We read at length about the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, and Lorenzini's *Adventures of Pinocchio;* but not a word about Dr. Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter,* alias 'Shockheaded Peter', the best-known children's rhyme-book of the last century, still in great demand. And where—shame!—are Gertrude Stein's *First Reader* and *The World Is Round,* the most original contributions to children's literature of our own day? And Père Castor's illustrated wild-animal books, translated by Rose Fyleman, and Jean de Brunhoff's admirable *Babar* series, translated by Mrs. Rieux?

These omissions must be due either to carelessness or ignorance. Another sort are due to editorial policy. Kipling's *Jungle Books,* which I have found by experience to be very hard going for children today, earn unqualified praise, and Jules Verne's tireless enterprise is acknowledged:

To the many nineteenth century milestones along the road of children's literature must be added one more: the rise of the scientific

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> adventure story. Jules Verne, its progenitor, was a Frenchman. . . . Far distant lands, the unknown depths of the ocean, the limitless airways attracted Verne as fields of activity in which his courageous and resourceful heroes might display their powers.

Yet the popularization by Edgar Rice Burroughs of the *Jungle Books* and Verne's scientific romances is carefully disregarded, though his *Tarzan* and Martian novels have reached ten million homes where the prototypes never penetrated, and fifty million more in diluted 'comic' form. This seems high-handed, not to say un-American, like the banning of Walt Disney's tremendous name, just because, artistically, he cannot rank with Kate Greenaway, Beatrix Potter, Walter Crane and Randolph Caldecott; and a total refusal of recognition to the Victorian 'penny dreadful', and its modern successors in violence, which are as much a part of children's literature as *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

The contributors reach the conclusion that:

> Any concern with childhood means looking ahead. It is the 'future in their faces' which has inspired poets and reformers. Children are that bit of ourselves which can be projected into the future which we cannot know. A discussion of the literature of childhood cannot be left with the past. What of the next fifty years? More books, no doubt. More good books, we can hope. . . .
>
> Children's books today have become an expression of their times. Critics in the future may look with condescension on the 'didacticism' of the books of our day, the self-conscious concern with understanding other peoples, learning the meaning of citizenship, analyzing present day problems, foisting upon children the concerns of their elders. For the span of childhood is brief, and relatively few are the books each child can know during that enchanted period. Of the great mountain of books of which we have been speaking, perhaps those will live which partake not merely of our times, dramatic and fantastic though they may be, but which are an expression of childhood itself—its joys and its loves, its dreams, its wonder.

This seems to me highly improbable. Once 3-D television has captured every home, the incentive to read even comics will be removed—and most children today use comics as their spelling books—so that in fifty years' time reading may well have become as rare an accomplishment as piano-playing. Yet, of this much we can be sure: whatever happens, the Spirit of Progressive Puericulture will continue to stand erect, smiling zestfully, with one well-pedicured foot planted in the old-fashioned American home, while (if I may be permitted to adopt the style of this *Critical History*) its fellow, clutching a torch, points resolutely onwards and upwards to a creative Heaven.

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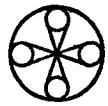

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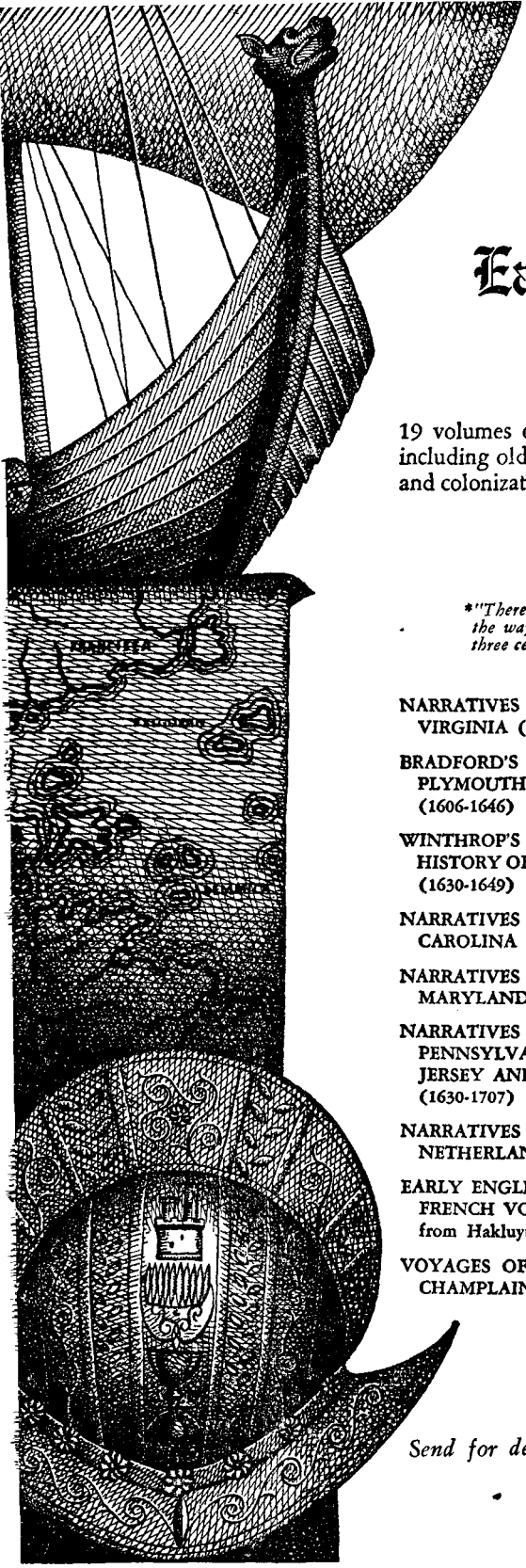

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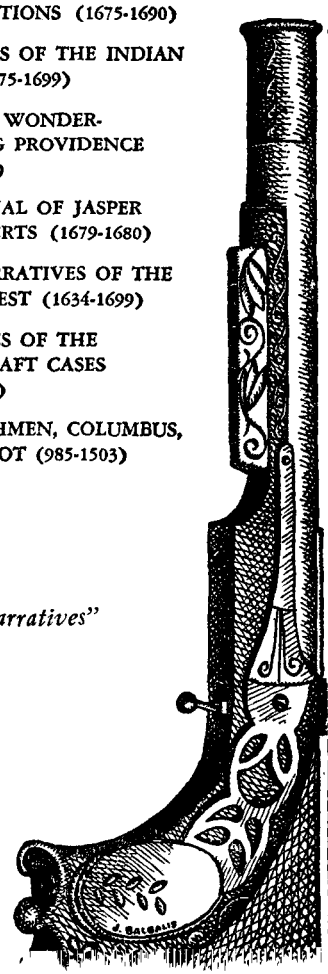

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